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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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UNFILTERED

In Tamil Nadu we tell women to study. But what is told in the North India? they say girls should not go to work, should be at home, be in the kitchen. bear children

—**Dayanidhi Maran,** DMK leader

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India climbs the passport index

INDIAN PERFORMED BETTER ON HENLEY PASSPORT INDEX. HERE ARE THE DETAILS:

Global rank: 80th of 199 (up from 85th in 2025)

Visa-free/ visa-on-arrival access: 55 countries

Lal Bagh-style parks planned in Bengaluru: DKS

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced that the State government will develop Lal Bagh-style parks in Bengaluru North and South, with Cabinet approval and financial backing from the GBA. Public feedback will guide the projects' development. Speaking at Lal Bagh's flower show, Shivakumar dismissed concerns over the tunnel road, assuring that Lal Bagh will remain unaffected while supporting City infrastructure growth. We are more concerned about Lal Bagh than others, he said. ***—Salar News***

>>>More on Page 2

In a 1st, Mercedes makes Maybach outside US in India

PUNE, 14 JAN

German luxury carmaker Mercedes-Benz will begin local production of its ultra-luxury GLS Maybach SUV in India, making the country the only one outside the US to assemble the model. Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director and CEO Santosh Iyer said the move follows India entering the company's top five global markets for Maybach in 2025. Local assembly will reduce the GLS Maybach's price to Rs 2.75 crore from Rs 3.17 crore. The model is currently produced in the US and will continue to be manufactured there for global markets. Iyer said Mercedes-Benz plans to launch 12 new models in India. ***—PTI***

Maharashtra civic bodies go to polls today

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

As Maharashtra heads to the elections on Thursday for 29 municipal corporations, the spotlight is on Mumbai, where the BJP-led Mahayuti is locked in a battle with the united Thackeray front for control of the cash-rich BMC. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has predicted that MNS leader Raj Thackeray would emerge as the biggest loser in his alliance with cousin and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray. Polling for the 2,869 seats spread across 893 wards will begin at 7.30am and conclude at 5.30pm on 15 January. ***—PTI***

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'Mining threatens Aravalli ecosystem'

Study says groundwater, air quality impacted

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Encroachments, deforestation, illegal mining, and urban expansion in the Aravalli ranges have severely impacted groundwater recharge, biodiversity, air quality, and climate regulation, a study has found.

The research, Eco-restoration of the Aravalli Landscape, conducted by Sankala Foundation with support from the Danish Embassy and Haryana Forest Department, highlights that diversion of forestlands around Sariska and Bardod Wildlife Sanctuaries prior to the 1980s fragmented habitats and water catchments, reducing native forest cover. The Aravalli, one of the world's oldest mountain ranges, is a vital ecosystem for the National Capital Region and the Indo-Gangetic Plains, supporting over 50 million people.

The report warns that forest patches are degraded, fragmented, and invaded by Prosopis juliflora, Lantana camara, and Parthenium hysterophorus, suppressing native biodiversity. Villages depend entirely on groundwater for irrigation, with over 43 per cent relying on forests for firewood, medicinal plants, and fodder, highlighting limited alternative livelihoods.

Thousands of hectares in the Aravalli region have been restored in the last two to three years and the government remains committed to continuing this work with ecology at the centre of development —Bhupender Yadav, Environment Minister

Rapid urbanisation has intensified land-use pressures: over the past decade, agricultural land fell by 429 hectares, forests shrank by 114 hectares, while built-up areas expanded by 323 hectares in peri-urban Gurugram. These changes have increased surface temperatures to 48–56°C, raising heat stress risks.

The report stresses ecosystem-based adaptation measures, including afforestation, water retention, and vegetation buffers, to restore degraded forests and enhance climate resilience. The study comes as the Supreme Court examines measures to protect the fragile Aravalli ecosystem, home to leopards, 40 bird species, and crucial wildlife corridors.

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav, who launched the study on Wednesday. *—PTI*

BLO kills self in K'taka; kin allege work pressure

SHIVAMOGGA, 14 JAN

A government school teacher, who was also assigned voter verification duty as a Booth Level Officer (BLO), died by suicide at the Government Higher Primary School in Baluru village in Shivamogga, with his family alleging work pressure as a possible cause.

The deceased is Dhananjayappa, 51, a native of Jinahalli village and a resident of Honnali. He is survived by his wife Asha, 38, and two daughters. Police said he arrived in the village early on Tuesday after carrying out voter verification and later went to the school, where he took his own life. Shikaripur Block Education Officer Lokesh told Salar News that there was no work pressure from the education department.

However, police officer Anand Patil told Salar Newx Dhananjayappa had expressed stress over his BLO duties to his wife earlier that morning. She advised him not to take undue tension and suggested opting for a Voluntary Retirement Scheme. A case has been filed. *—Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416 for support.

MEA asks Indians to leave Iran

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

India on Wednesday asked all its nationals residing in Iran to leave by available means and avoid any travel to the country as tensions mounted over possible military intervention by the US over Tehran's crackdown on nationwide protests that killed over 2,500 people.

According to estimates, a little over 10,000 Indians, including students, are currently living in Iran.

New Delhi has also strongly advised its nationals to avoid travelling to Iran.

The protests began late last month in Tehran after the Iranian currency rial plunged to record lows. The protests have since spread to all 31 provinces, evolving from an agitation against economic woes to a demand for political change.

The overall situation in Iran in the last few days has deteriorated dramatically as the death toll from the nationwide protests has increased to over 2,500, according to US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA).

The protests in the country have also triggered wider tensions in West Asia after US President Donald Trump warned Tehran against a brutal crackdown on demonstrators, indicating US military strikes.

In a message to the protesters, Trump said on Tuesday that "help is on the way".

Meanwhile, some personnel at a key US military base in Qatar have been advised to evacuate by Wednesday evening, a US official said. The decision came as a senior official in Iran brought up an earlier Iranian attack there.

Pro-govt protesters rally in Tehran ***PHOTO: X/@KHAMENEI_IR***

The official described the move at the base as a precautionary measure.

The official wouldn't go into any further details about the move, including whether the evacuation was optional or mandatory, if it affected troops or civilian personnel, or the number of those advised to leave, citing the need for operational security.. *—PTI*

Helpline numbers: +989128109115; +989128109109; +989128109102;

Zubeen not murdered, he declined life jacket: Report

SINGAPORE, 14 JAN

Popular Indian singer-songwriter Zubeen Garg was not murdered, but was "severely intoxicated" and had drowned off Lazarus Island after declining a life jacket, a coroner's court in Singapore was told on Wednesday.

Garg, 52, was with a yacht party on 19 September, 2025, when he drowned a day before he was slated to perform at the North East India Festival in Singapore.

The singer initially wore a life jacket, but removed it and later declined to put on a second one, the chief investigating officer told the court in the opening of the inquiry, Channel News Asia reported.

Several witnesses saw him trying to swim back to the yacht when he went limp and began floating with his face in the water. He was rescued and given cardiopulmonary resuscitation, but was pronounced dead later.

An autopsy determined the cause of death to be drowning. Injuries on his body were sustained during CPR and rescue.

However, ahead of the Assembly polls this year, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma alleged Garg's death to be foul play. A special investigation team probing the case, charged festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's secretary Siddhartha Sharma and his two band members with murder, and his cousin with culpable homicide not amounting to murder. *—PTI*

Spanish capsule survives despite PSLV launch failure

CHENNAI, 14 JAN

In a development linked to the failed PSLV-C62 mission, Spanish start-up Orbital Paradigm on Tuesday claimed its re-entry capsule survived separation and transmitted data after launch.

ISRO has not confirmed the claim and earlier said the 12 January mission failed due to disturbances in the rocket's third stage.

The 25-kg Kestrel Initial Technology Demonstrator (KID) was one of 16 payloads onboard. While 15 satellites were to be deployed at 512 km, KID was scheduled to separate at 504 km before re-entry into the South Pacific.

Orbital Paradigm said the capsule "switched on and transmitted data".

All other payloads were lost. *—PTI*

SUGGI HABBA

Women buy sugarcane and ellu-bella ahead of Suggi Habba, Makar Sankranti and Pongal in Bengaluru on Wednesday. Ellu-bella, a traditional festive mix, includes sun-dried copra, jaggery, roasted groundnuts, sesame seeds, fried gram and candied cumin seeds ***PHOTO: PTI***

Cal HC bins TMC's plea against ED raids on I-PAC

KOLKATA, 14 JAN

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday disposed of the Trinamool Congress' petition seeking protection of its data, after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) informed that it had not seized anything from I-PAC director Pratik Jain's office or home during raids on 8 January.

The TMC had sought preservation of personal and political data allegedly seized during the raids ahead of the assembly polls.

Representing the ED, Additional Solicitor General SV Raju told the court that no material had been taken, and whatever was seized had been removed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Justice Suvra Ghosh observed that in light of the ED and Union submissions, nothing further remained for adjudication. The court also adjourned a separate ED petition seeking a CBI probe into the January 8 events, citing pending special leave petitions before the Supreme Court on the same matter.

The disputes arose after Banerjee visited the agency's Salt Lake office and Jain's Loudon Street residence, alleging attempts to seize sensitive TMC data. TMC counsel Menaka Guruswamy stressed political parties' right to privacy. The ED, naming Banerjee and state officials as respondents, sought to transfer the probe to the CBI, alleging interference by the West Bengal government.

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear the ED's plea on Thursday. *—PTI*

CLIMATE IN CRISIS

2025 was 3rd warmest year ever: EU scientists

BRUSSELS, 14 JAN

The world recorded its third-warmest year on record in 2025, with global average temperatures remaining above 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming for three consecutive years, the longest such stretch since records began, according to European Union scientists.

Data from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) showed that 2023, 2024 and 2025 were the three hottest years ever recorded, with 2025 only 0.01°C cooler than 2023. The UK Met Office separately confirmed 2025 as the third-warmest year since 1850, while the World Meteorological Organisation is due to release its assessment later on Wednesday.

Scientists warned the prolonged breach of the 1.5°C threshold, the aspirational limit under the Paris Agreement, signals intensifying climate risks. "1.5°C is not a cliff edge, but every fraction of a degree matters," said Samantha Burgess of ECMWF, citing escalating extreme weather.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Copernicus Climate Change Service director Carlo Buontempo said exceeding the limit is now inevitable, adding the challenge lies in managing the overshoot. In 2025, Europe saw record wildfire emissions, while climate change intensified Hurricane Melissa and deadly monsoon floods in Pakistan. Despite mounting evidence, political resistance is growing. US President Donald Trump recently withdrew from multiple UN bodies, including the IPCC. *—Agencies*

Cyber insecurity top risk for India in 2026: WEF

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Cyber insecurity is the biggest risk facing India in 2026, even as geoeconomic conflict has emerged as the top global threat, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report, released ahead of the Davos annual meeting, on Wednesday.

For India, the report lists cyber insecurity as the foremost concern, followed by income inequality, inadequate public services and social protection, economic downturn and State-based armed conflict. Globally, geoeconomic confrontation has climbed eight places to rank first over a two-year horizon, ahead of misinformation, societal polarisation, extreme weather and interstate conflict.

The WEF warned that critical infrastructure, including water systems, is becoming a new front for conflict, citing potential flashpoints such as the Indus river basin between India and Pakistan. It also flagged deepfakes and online misinformation as growing threats to elections, including in India.

At the same time, the report cited India's Unified Payments Interface as a positive example of building resilient digital financial systems. Based on a survey of over 1,300 global leaders, the report said most expect a turbulent world in coming years, with risks intensifying amid geopolitical fragmentation. *—PTI*

- The WEF warned that critical infrastructure, including water systems, is becoming a new front for conflict, citing potential flashpoints between India and Pakistan.

Bus found with Andhra and K'taka registrations

KOLAR, 14 JAN

Transport authorities in Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) intercepted a private bus with multiple registration numbers during a routine check late last night, officials said. The bus, carrying devotees returning from Mel Marattur to Sidlaghatta, displayed a Karnataka registration at the front and an Andhra Pradesh number plate at the rear. On verifying the chassis number through the Vahan portal, officials found that the bus was actually registered in Mysuru, said Gayathri Devi, Joint Commissioner, Transport Department. The vehicle was seized after alternative arrangements were made for passengers. Preliminary investigation revealed the bus had a permit from Hindupur in Andhra Pradesh and was reportedly owned by YG Somu of Bagepalli in Chikkaballapura district. This comes shortly after authorites found two buses with the same licence plate in the district. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Two arrested with 21 kg ganja in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Viveknagar Police have arrested two individuals for attempting to sell ganja. Officers seized 21kg 210g of the drug and two mobile phones used in the offence, worth Rs 21 lakh. On Friday, police received information that the suspects were selling ganja on the footpath opposite India Garage, on the road towards Vanarpet. Acting on the tip-off, officers apprehended the two suspects. During questioning, the accused admitted they had bought the ganja cheaply from a person in Odisha. A case was registered under the NDPS Act. The accused were remanded to custody, while two others remain at large. *—PTI*

CM urges Centre to procure Bengal gram at MSP

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, seeking immediate procurement of Bengal gram under the Price Support Scheme (PSS) amid falling market prices. He said despite an MSP of Rs 5,875 per quintal for the 2026–27 harvest season, prices in Karnataka APMCs have dropped Rs 800–1,200 below MSP, forcing distress sales. The State has 9.24 lakh hectares under Bengal gram cultivation, producing 6.27 lakh tonnes. He called for NAFED and NCCF to begin procurment. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Two lakh illegal Bangladeshis in City: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka alleged that there are around 2 lakh illegal Bangladeshi immigrants living in Bengaluru. He said that the illegal immigrants themselves are admitting to the figure. He claimed that at least 71 suspected Bangladeshi illegal immigrants have been arrested in the past week alone, but said that the Congress wasn't doing enough to address the "influx" of illegals. Claiming that the State government was prioritising vote bank politics, he demanded a special task force for the detection and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. *—Salar News*

Congress leader 'abuses' Sidlaghatta Commissioner

Sidlaghatta civic Corp head files plaint as workers protest

SIDLAGHATTA, 14 JAN

Civic workers of the Sidlaghatta City Municipality protested against Rajeev Gowda on Wednesday after a leaked audio purportedly showed the Congress leader allegedly abused the Sidlaghatta City Municipal Corporation Commissioner.

Rajeev, who unsuccessfully contested the last Assembly elections, allegedly threatened Commissioner Amrutha Gowda's life after authorities removed posters of the film 'Cult'. Rajeev had invited several members of the film's cast and crew to the constituency.

An audio clip of the alleged conversation has gone viral, where Rajeev purportedly threatens Amrutha, saying he would ensure that she is transferred from Sidlaghatta.

He also purportedly says that he would make his supporters hurl chappals at her.

"If my banner is removed then I would come and set things on fire. You have seen my gentleness, not my evil side," Rajeev reportedly said.

Congress leader Rajeev Gowda; Sidlaghatta City Municipal Corporation workers protest on Wednesday; Sidlaghatta City Municipal Corporation Commissioner Amrutha Gowda *PHOTOS: LINKEDIN/SALAR*

"I will create riot in all the 31 wards."

However, Amrutha told him that the banner was removed because it was obstructing traffic.

As the audio clip went viral, civic workers protested and demanded an apology.

Speaking during the protest on Wednesday, Amrutha said that this was the second time Rajeev had threatened her. He had previously verbally assaulted her over a banner issue during Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's visit.

Civic workers threatened to launch a hunger strike if action was not taken against the Congress leader. CMC Chintamani Commissioner GN Chalapathi said he would urge district in-charge minister Sudhakar to initiate action.

However, Rajeev said that the clip has been edited, and denied threatening the Commissioner. Amrutha later filed a complaint against Rajeev.

The Opposition slammed Rajeev. BJP leader Chalavadi Narayanaswamy said Rajeev was raking up a banner issues close on the heels of the Ballari clash, where a man was allegedly shot dead. JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy condemned Rajeev for speaking derogatorily against a woman officer.

In response,DyCM DK Shivakumar said: "No one is above the law." *—Salar News*

'TO SAVE MGNREGA'

Joint session of legislature from 22 Jan on G Ram G

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

The Cabinet on Wednesday decided to convene a joint session of the State legislature from January 22 to 31, with a primary focus on the Centre's decision to repeal MGNREGA.

While the Congress government initially planned a two-day special session to discuss the repeal of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which the Centre replaced with Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB—G RAM G), State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil explained that the format was changed due to constitutional requirements.

Patil said the government is convening a joint session and not a special session due to a technical reason.

Quoting Article 176 of the Constitution, he said the Governor must address the first session of the State legislature each year. "In view of this technical reason, in fact, we are advancing the session. Instead of a special session, it will be a joint session until further session.... Holidays will be announced by the Speaker."

Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly, R Ashoka alleged that the State government has convened the joint session with a "malafide intention" and called it a "sheer waste of money".

He said: "A session is always convened to make laws, discuss law and order, but what is this session convened for? Is it to utter gibberish in the House? There is no use of this session." The BJP leader said the resolution passed in the assembly will only be consigned to the dustbin as it has no value. *—PTI*

Efforts fail, but prayers don't: DKS after RaGa meet

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar cryptically posted on X that "efforts may fail, but prayers won't" after his meeting with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar met Gandhi separately in Mysuru on Tuesday amid the alleged power tussle. Siddaramaiah clarified after the meeting that he would remain the Chief Minister until further instructions from the High Command.

Shivakumar added on Wednesday that Gandhi appreciated the State government but declined to comment further.

"Can our meeting with him, discussions with him, giving respect to him and receiving him as per protocol – be discussed in public? You (media) unnecessarily quoting someone off the record are creating confusion and are destroying the respect your TV channels have," Shivakumar said in response to a question.

Asked about his social media post, Shivakumar said he has made similar statements before.

"Recently, I had been to Udyami Vokkaliga-FC Expo 2025 (an entrepreneurial extravaganza dedicated to fostering the growth and success of Vokkaliga enterprises), there I had told them this. The same has been tweeted," he clarified. Shivakumar said he would be going to Delhi soon, as he has been made the Congress poll observer for the upcoming Assam elections.

Meanwhile, Home Minister G Parameshwara said the meetings were a "normal courtesy call". *—Agencies*

Merz's trip was private: Patil on BJP's comments

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Minister MB Patil on Wednesday defended Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar, saying they did not receive German Chancellor Friedrich Merz during his visit here as it was a private, pre-scheduled programme.

Patil accused the BJP of "politicising" the visit. The BJP had earlier claimed that Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar prioritised meeting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi instead of receiving a foreign dignitary.

Meanwhile, Congress MLA Ashok Pattan said that Gandhi has asked Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar to visit Delhi, but said the date for the meeting is yet to be finalised.

They can go to Delhi after Sankranti, he added, stating that "everything will be fine after CM DyCM's visit to Delhi."

However, Pattan was unclear whether Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar would discuss the Cabinet reshuffle or the leadership row. *—Agencies*

REPUBLIC DAY FLOWER SHOW

Bengaluru's Glass House at Lalbagh is all decked up for The Republic Day flower show. This year's show is an ode to one of the most influential Kannada writers Poornachandra Tejaswi, who also used his art for enviornmental advocacy *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Prison reforms panel submits report

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

The high-level committee on Karnataka prison reforms, headed by ADGP (Law and Order) R Hitendra, submitted its report to Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday.

The committee's recommendations, which cover illegal acts, security measures and reforms in state prisons, will be reviewed with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah before action, Parameshwara told reporters.

"If necessary, (I will) submit it to the Cabinet," he said.

The report comes in the context of allegations of preferential treatment and illegal activities in some prisons. Videos purportedly showed inmates, including notorious criminals and a terror suspect, enjoying preferential treatment inside Parappana Agrahara Central Jail in Bengaluru.

Officials said the panel examined security protocols, prisoner management, and potential reforms in the prison system. *—PTI*

New Zealand seeks long term partnership with K'taka in PMSA

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

A New Zealand innovation delegation met IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday to discuss collaboration under the Prime Minister's Scholarship for Asia (PMSA) programme. The talks focused on strengthening people-to-people ties and establishing long-term institutional links. The delegation included representatives from research, technology, education, and innovation sectors.

Kharge proposed skill and market-access corridors. He also suggested cooperation in AI, aerospace, climate and sensor technologies, agritech, and marine biotechnology. Both sides will plan a working group and a MoU. *—PTI*

Lokayukta files case after alive farmer declared dead

BELAGAVI, 14 JAN

The Karnataka Lokayukta has taken suo motu cognisance and has registered a case against four government officials for allegedly creating and certifying a false death certificate of a farmer who is very much alive.

The farmer, Irappa Nagappa Abbai, 53, of Sutagatti village in Savadatti taluk, was officially declared dead in government records in 2021, despite being alive.

Based on this erroneous entry, a death certificate was issued in his name, resulting in him being denied benefits of government welfare schemes.

After media reports exposed the matter, Upa (deputy) Lokayukta Justice Veerappa ordered registration of a case against Neela Muragod, Village Accountant, Sutagatti, RS Patil, Revenue Inspector, Muragod Circle, Mallikarjun Heggannavar, Tahsildar, Savadatti and Praveen Jain, Sub-Divisional Officer, Bailhongal.

Justice Veerappa said the Lokayukta initiated proceedings after the allegations were found to be true.

Meanwhile, Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Roshan suspended Neela Muragod, who entered Irappa's name as dead in official records.

The Lokayukta has begun a detailed probe to fix responsibility for what has been termed a serious administrative failure. *—Salar News*

Minor girl dies after dog attack in Bagalkot

BAGALKOT, 14 JAN,

A 10-year-old girl, who was critically injured in a stray dog attack in Bagalkot district last week, has succumbed to her injuries while undergoing treatment at Karnataka Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) in Hubballi.

The victim, identified as Alaina Lokapur, was attacked by a stray dog in Sector No. 15 of Navanagar in Bagalkot. She sustained severe injuries to her eyes, nose, and face during the attack.

She was initially admitted to the Bagalkot District Hospital and was later shifted to the KIMS for advanced treatment. Despite efforts, doctors could not save her. The incident highlighted concerns over and public safety in urban areas. *—Salar News*

SILENT KILLER

Motorist dies after kite string slits his throat

BIDAR, 14 JAN

A motorcyclist died in Bidar after a kite string (manja) got entangled around his neck. Kite flying is common around the time of Makar Sankranti.

The deceased, Sanjukumar Hosamani, 48, was riding his motorcycle near the Talamadgi bridge in Bidar district on Wednesday, when the string cut into his neck like a blade, causing injuries and throwing him off the motorcycle.

He then attempted to call his daughter, despite bleeding profusely.

The video of him calling his daughter when injured has gone viral.

Locals attempted to administer aid and help him after calling an ambulance, but he died before it arrived, eyewitnesses said.

WAS THE AMBULANCE TOO SLOW?

Sanjukumar's relatives alleged that institutional negligence caused the death. They told media persons that a delay in emergency response caused his death. Mannakheli police have launched an investigation.

THE DEADLY RISE OF CHINESE MANJA

'Chinese manja', or nylon thread, has been steadily replacing the cotton threads coated with glass powder that were previously used for kite flying. Chinese manja is cheaper and more durable but also more difficult to see.

A CHAIN OF DEATHS

Despite bans, these lethal strings continue to be available in markets and have caused a chain of deaths across the country. On Monday, a man in Indore died in a similar incident.

In 2025, a 22-year-old man died in a similar motorcycle incident in Delhi, while a seven-year-old boy died in 2023 due to the Chinese Manja. *—Salar News*

Ballari row: BJP books Laxman for remarks on Shah

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

A BJP delegation has filed a complaint against Congress Spokesperson M Laxman, accusing him of spreading false information and making provocative statements that allegedly incite public unrest and hatred. The delegation met Karnataka DGP MA Saleem.

According to the complaint, Laxman has been accused of creating unrest in the state by making false remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union MoS V Somanna.

The complaint alleges that Laxman held a press conference in Mysuru on 8 January where he said: At the instigation of Shah, there was a riot in Ballari."

Laxman allegedly said that the riot occurred after Somanna visited Ballari and held discussions with Janardhan Reddy and Sriramulu. The complaint claims Laxman said that Somanna passed on Shah's message to Janardhan and Sriramulu "to drop a body and do politics".

Laxman has made similar statements in the past, and several defamation cases are already pending against him, the complaint stated. It alleges that his remarks can disturb public peace. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

Lalu visits Tej Pratap, sparks reconciliation talks

PATNA, 14 JAN

RJD president Lalu Prasad attended a Makar Sankranti feast at his elder son Tej Pratap Yadav's house on Wednesday, months after expelling him from the party and cutting personal ties. Yadav, who later founded the Janshakti Janta Dal (JJD), had invited his parents and younger brother Tejashwi. Only Prasad, in his late 70s and largely home bound due to health issues, attended. He did not speak to journalists, but the visit sparked speculation about a possible family reconciliation after the RJD's recent electoral defeat. Prasad had expelled Yadav last May over personal controversies, including a social media post about a long-term relationship, which Yadav later claimed was due to hacking. Governor Arif Mohammad Khan also attended the feast. *—PTI*

Kashmiri separatist Andrabi found guilty under UAPA

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

A Delhi court on Wednesday convicted Kashmiri separatist and Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DeM) chief Asiya Andrabi in a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Additional Sessions Judge Chanderjit Singh held her guilty under Sections 18, relating to conspiracy, and 38, concerning membership of a terrorist organisation. The court will decide her sentence on 17 January. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) had charged Andrabi and two associates with waging war against India through hate speeches, criminal conspiracy, and offenses under the UAPA. Andrabi founded the all-women separatist group Dukhtaraan-e-Millat in 1987. She was arrested in April 2018, and the group was banned for its involvement in separatist activities. *—PTI*

Aditya Sahu named President of Jharkhand BJP

RANCHI, 14 JAN

Rajya Sabha MP Aditya Sahu was elected president of the opposition BJP in Jharkhand on Wednesday, replacing former chief minister Babulal Marandi. Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram, who oversaw the state unit elections, announced Sahu's appointment, noting he received only one nomination. Sahu had been appointed working president earlier. Sahu pledged to devote himself to the party, with support from experienced leaders, and vowed to protect "jal, jangal and jamin" (water, forest and land) and tribal rights. He criticised the JMM-led government for corruption, law and order issues, and rising incidents of murder and abduction affecting tribal. Oram said that Sahu would strengthen the party and help it regain power in the state. Marandi said BJP would grow stronger under Sahu. *—PTI*

US Ambassador Gor presents his credentials to Prez

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor presented his credentials to President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Wednesday, according to an official statement. Gor, 38, was sworn in as ambassador in mid-November after the US Senate confirmed his appointment in October. He previously served as White House personnel director before President Donald Trump named him envoy to New Delhi in August 2025. At the ceremony, Murmu formally accepted Gor's credentials. Earlier this week, Gor signalled efforts to reset ties, saying no country was as essential as India to the United States and that both sides were actively engaged to firm up a trade deal. *—PTI*

M'rashtra civic polls get back-up for 'tech glitch'

MNS Chief slams SEC for allowing door-to-door canvassing after poll campaign ended

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

The Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) on Wednesday said that Printing Auxiliary Display Unit (PADU) will be used only if technical difficulties arise during the counting of votes for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections.

In a statement issued a day before the crucial election, the SEC said the facility to view results using PADU would be available only in rare circumstances.

The voting machines manufactured by the Bharat Electronics Ltd are being used exclusively for Thursday's BMC elections, the commission said, adding that these machines belong to the Election Commission of India and are of the 'M3A' type.

Additionally, the electors in the upcoming BMC polls will be required to present either a voter photo ID card or any one of the 12 alternative identity documents approved by the SEC to cast their vote, officials said.

Meanwhile, SEC has prohibited civic poll candidates from using microphones and moving in large groups during door-to-door canvassing, citing its decision to allow only limited personal outreach after the end of the public campaign.

Ahead of BMC polls, Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray and MNS President Raj Thackeray visited the iconic Mumbadevi temple in Mumbai, on Wednesday *PHOTO: X/AMITRTHACKERAY*

Earlier, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) Chief Raj Thackeray slammed the SEC for allowing door-to-door canvassing after the official civic poll campaign ended, claiming it was helping the ruling Mahayuti win the polls.

Incidentally, a day after the elections to Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis were announced,

Navi Mumbai Police Commissioner Milind Bharambe issued orders to maintain public order and ensure smooth traffic flow during the campaign period. Police have regulated the placement of campaign materials to ensure they do not hinder public movement or safety.

Additionally, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said minorities know they are "used as vote machines and discarded" and added Opposition's "vote jihad" slogan will no longer work against his party BJP, comments coming on the eve of civic corporation polls. *—PTI*

BJP candidate's husband attacked, Sena workers held

The husband of BJP candidate Arya Natekar was seriously injured after being attacked allegedly by around 60 Shinde Sena workers, police said on Wednesday. Natekar, a local contractor, claimed he was struck on the head with a sharp weapon and an iron rod during the assault. He was rushed to hospital and is undergoing treatment. Police have arrested five party workers in connection with the incident and are investigating further. Security was tightened in the area. *—Agencies*

Disposal of petition embarrassment for Mamata, says BJP

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

- The Calcutta HC on Wednesday disposed of the TMC's petition for protection of its data, saying ED has informed that it has not seized anything from I-PAC director's office and home during its raids.

The BJP on Wednesday described as "massive embarrassment" for West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee the Calcutta High Court decision to dispose of TMC's petition praying for protection of its data that may have been seized by the ED from I-PAC director Pratik Jain's office and home during its raids last week.

The "corruption" of the TMC and its "corrupt link" with the private company will "soon" be exposed, the BJP said, asserting that constitutional authorities cannot be intimidated by political theatrics and the High Court has made that amply clear.

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday disposed of the TMC's petition for protection of its data, saying the ED has informed that it has not seized anything from I-PAC director Pratik Jain's office and home during its raids last week.

Reacting to the development, BJP co-incharge for West Bengal Amit Malviya wrote in a post on X, "Massive embarrassment for Mamata Banerjee."

"The Calcutta High Court has set aside Mamata Banerjee's objection against the Enforcement Directorate, delivering a sharp rebuke to her blatant interference," he said, adding, "Over to the Supreme Court now."

Additionally, West Bengal Opposition leader Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday warned the Chief Minister of legal action over her alleged remarks linking him to a coal smuggling case.

In a post on X, Adhikari said the deadline for Banerjee to respond to a defamation notice had expired, accusing her of making baseless allegations. He said he would now initiate civil and criminal defamation proceedings.

Adhikari had served the notice last week, asking Banerjee to provide evidence within 72 hours to support her claim. The notice said she publicly linked Adhikari and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to the alleged scam without producing proof. *—PTI*

MATUA ELDER'S DEATH LINKED TO SIR ANXIETY

A 70-year-old man from the Matua community died after being hit by a train near Guma station in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, with his family alleging anxiety over an SIR hearing led to suicide. Nikhil Chandra Das was found critically injured on Tuesday night and later died in the hospital. His relatives said he feared being sent to Bangladesh if his documents were rejected. Police have ordered a post-mortem and are investigating. *—PTI*

'Parasakthi' film cast joins Modi for Pongal celebration

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended Pongal celebrations in the national capital on Wednesday, hailing it as a global festival representing one of the oldest civilisations in the world.

"The festival of Pongal reminds us that gratitude should go beyond mere words and become an integral part of our daily lives," Modi said at the celebrations held at the residence of Union Minister L Murugan here

Leading lights of the Tamil society, including the cast of the recently released film Parasakthi, were present at the event, which is being seen as an outreach to the southern state, where assembly elections are due in the next few months.

Modi said this festival celebrates the hard work of the farmers and expresses gratitude to the land and the Sun. Vice President CP Radhakrishnan, Union Ministers G Kishan Reddy, and Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu were also present at the function.

PM Narendra Modi and 'Parasakthi' actors Sivakarthikeyan, Ravi Mohan celebrating Pongal in New Delhi *PHOTOS: PTI/SCREENGRAB*

The BJP later slammed Congress Lok Sabha MP Rahul Gandhi for his remarks on Tuesday, accusing Prime Minister Modi of suppressing the voice of the Tamil People by allegedly trying to block actor-turned-politician Vijay's film "Jana Nayagan".

At a press conference, BJP spokesperson Guru Prakash Pawan termed Rahul's statement 'extremely shameful and painful'. *—PTI*

TVK says RaGa's support was a 'friendly gesture'

Actor-politician Vijay-led Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) has said it considered Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi**'s support to Vijay-starrer 'Jana Nayagan' as a "friendly gesture". Since the Kar ur stampede on 27 September, 2025, he was supportive, and his statement today in favour of Vijay's final film, and opposing Centre, was a 'friendly gesture', a TVK leader said, declining speculation on poll alliance. A senior Congress leader said it had nothing to do with Tamil Nadu politics. *—PTI*

TN BJP leader Annamalai tight-lipped on Vijay-NDA tie-up

Tamil Nadu BJP leader **K Annamalai** on Wednesday, was tight-lipped about a possible alliance with actor-politician Vijay's TVK ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections, saying he is not authorised to comment on it.

However, he acknowledged that the priority must be given to consolidating all anti-DMK votes to ensure the ruling party's defeat. When reporters asked him in New Delhi whether a Vijay-BJP tie-up would strengthen the NDA, Annamalai reiterated, "... there are some things which I don't want to answer. It's above my pay grade." *—PTI*

'Centre denied clearance for Punjab CM's UK, Israel visit'

CHANDIGARH, 14 JAN

The Centre has denied political clearance to Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Industries Minister Sanjeev Arora for a proposed visit to the United Kingdom and Israel in February to attract investments, the State's ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said on Wednesday.

AAP General Secretary and media in-charge Baltej Pannu said the delegation, which was to include senior State officials, could not finalise dates after the Ministry of External Affairs withheld approval, without citing reasons.

Senior leaders require political clearance from the Centre for overseas travel.

Mann, who holds a diplomatic passport, was scheduled to undertake a week-long tour aimed at boosting investor outreach. *—PTI*

Digvijaya Singh says he won't seek another RS term

BHOPAL, 14 JAN

Senior Congress leader **Digvijaya Singh** has said that he will not seek a third Rajya Sabha term after the end of his current tenure in the Upper House of Parliament.

The former Madhya Pradesh CM made the statement on Tuesday while responding to a request made by the state Congress Scheduled Caste Cell chairman Pradeep Ahirwar to ensure representation from the Scheduled Caste category in the Rajya Sabha this time.

Scheduled Castes account for about 70 per cent of Madhya Pradesh's population, Ahirwar said, adding that it will uphold social balance and constitutional spirit, and also "strengthen the self-respect and political participation of the Dalit community."

- Two Rajya Sabha seats from the BJP-ruled state will become vacant in April this year.

Asked about the demand on the sidelines of a convention of SC-ST organisations, Singh, 78, said, "It is not in my hands. I will say with certainty that I am vacating my seat."

Two Rajya Sabha seats from the BJP-ruled state will become vacant in April this year. *—PTI*

Congress' soft communal stand hurt nation: Jamiat Chief

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind President **Maulana Arshad Madani** on Wednesday accused Congress of adopting a "flexible policy" during its rule towards politics based on religion, saying it damaged country and the Constitution.

In a post on X, Madani said Congress would not have lost power and India would not have reached "the brink of destruction" had it taken a firm stand against communalism 77 years ago. He alleged communal forces were treated with leniency after Independence, allowing them to grow, despite demands for strict legal action. Referring to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, he said crushing communalism then could have saved the nation from devastation. *—PTI*

'TRYING TO CREATE REGIONAL RIFT'

BJP-DMK face-off over Maran's remark

CHENNAI, 14 JAN

DMK leader **Dayanidhi Maran**'s remarks that girls in Tamil Nadu were asked to study, and their counterparts in the north were asked to stay at home, be in the kitchen and bear children, evoked a sharp reaction from the BJP on Wednesday.

Condemning Maran's comment, BJP leader Narayanan Thirupathy accused the DMK of "trying to create regional rifts."

"Once again, Dayanidhi Maran and DMK have spoken without any sense. This is what the Dravidian model is about...How can they abuse the North Indian women?" the BJP leader said.

- "Once again, Dayanidhi Maran and DMK have spoken without any sense. This is what the Dravidian model is about...How can they abuse the North Indian women?"

Terming Maran's remarks as "wrong", he said, "You may say that you are big...But you cannot demean others..."

Arguing that women's empowerment in Tamil Nadu is not a modern Dravidian invention, he noted that poet Bharathiyar championed these causes long before the DMK's rise.

He claimed that the Dravidian model has now become a tool for "abusing North Indians" and creating a rift between the Hindi-speaking people and the non-Hindi-speaking population.

Participating in a function presided by Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin here on Tuesday, Maran said, "everything for everyone" (Ellarukum ellam) is the goal of the Dravidian model government helmed by Chief Minister MK Stalin.

"In TN, we tell women to study. But what is told in North India? They say girls should not go to work, they should be at home, be in the kitchen, bear children. This is your job. They say like this," Maran said here. *—PTI*

Harness art to counter threats to peace: Vijayan

THRISSUR, 14 JAN

Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** on Wednesday said art should not be just for entertainment but must awaken people to "burning life experiences" and fight against those who try to destroy peace and happiness in the name of religion.

Vijayan was speaking after inaugurating the 64th Kerala School Kalolsavam (art festival) here where around 14,000 students will participate in 249 events at 24 venues, in Thrissur.

The CM said that in the past, art forms were confined to a particular caste or religion.

"With the end of feudalism, the nature of arts changed. All arts became everyone's.

Art introduced secularism and democracy to life. School art festivals played a vital role in it," he said.

Referring to Kalamandalam Hyderali, a singer from Thrissur district, the CM said that the artist had faced some "unfortunate experiences" due to his religion.

"Being humiliated for being born in a different religion cannot be accepted," CM Vijayan said, addressing a gathering including Union Minister of State for Petroleum, Natural Gas and Tourism Suresh Gopi. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

29 Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh

SUKMA, 14 JAN

As many as 29 Naxalites surrendered before police in Sukma, Chhattisgarh on Wednesday, officials said. The cadres, linked to CPI (Maoist) frontal wings, laid down arms under the State's rehabilitation policy. Podiam Budhra, carrying a Rs 2 lakh reward, was among them. Police said a new security camp and intensified operations in Gogunda dismantled a Maoist base, weakening the Darbha division. More than 1,500 Naxalites surrendered in the State in 2025. The Centre has resolved to eliminate Naxalism from the country by 31 March this year. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Expelled Cong MLA taken for evidence collection by SIT

PATHANAMTHITTA, 14 JAN

Expelled Congress MLA Rahul Mamkootathil was taken by a Special Investigation Team on Wednesday for evidence collection in a sexual assault case, police sources said. He was taken to a Thiruvalla hotel where the alleged assault occurred, with heavy police deployment. A court had remanded him to SIT custody on Tuesday. Mamkootathil was arrested on Sunday in Palakkad in a third assault case, registered on a 8 January complaint file under IPC sections 376 and 506(1)—*PTI*

Bomb threats trigger searches in Ludhiana court

LUDHIANA, 14 JAN

Security was stepped up on Wednesday as police conducted a thorough search at the Ludhiana court complex and a school in Moga after bomb threat emails were received. The Ludhiana complex was sealed, with bomb disposal and dog squads deployed, and the district bar announced a 'no work' day. In Moga, students were sent home after evacuation. Police said checks were going on to assess the threats' credibility. "We are conducting a check of the school premises. The school was evacuated, and the children left," he said. A week ago, courts in Ferozepur and Ropar were evacuated after they received threat emails, which later turned out to be a hoax. Last month, schools in Patiala and Jalandhar received bomb threats. However, they turned out to be a hoax. Recent threats in Punjab later proved hoaxes, officials said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Hisar records 0.5°C as cold wave grips Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 14 JAN

Cold conditions persisted across Haryana on Wednesday, with Hisar recording a minimum of 0.5 degrees Celsius, six notches below normal, the Met department said. Fog reduced morning visibility in several parts of Haryana and neighbouring Punjab. Narnaul logged 1 degree Celsius and Bhiwani 1.2 degrees, while Gurugram, Ambala, Karnal, Faridabad and Rohtak remained up to five degrees below normal. Chandigarh recorded 3.8 degrees Celsius, its second-coldest night this season. The chill gripped much of the region. —*PTI*

NEET PG-2025 cut-offs slashed after counselling

18,000 post-graduate seats remain vacant after round two

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

With over 18,000 post-graduate medical seats across the country remaining vacant, the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) has revised the qualifying percentiles for NEET-PG 2025 admissions, reducing it to zero percentile from 40 percentile for reserved categories.

The notice published by NBEMS on Tuesday says that the NEET PG cut-off for the general category has been reduced to seven percentile from 50.

The decision comes after the completion of round two counselling.

Official sources said the revision aims to ensure optimal utilisation of available seats, which are vital for expanding India's pool of trained medical specialists.

Leaving such seats vacant undermines efforts to improve healthcare delivery and results in the loss of valuable educational resources, the sources said.

NEET-PG serves as a ranking mechanism to facilitate merit-based allocation of seats through centralised counselling PHOTO: ANI

NEET-PG serves as a ranking mechanism to facilitate transparent, merit-based allocation of seats through centralised counselling.

The previous percentile thresholds had restricted the pool of eligible candidates despite the availability of seats.

Listing the key highlights, official sources said the admissions remain strictly merit-based, determined by NEET-PG rank and candidate preferences.

Allotments will be made only through authorised counselling mechanisms and no direct or discretionary admissions are permitted. Merit and choice-based allocation will continue to guide seat distribution, the sources said.

- The notice published by NBEMS on Tuesday says that the NEET PG cut-off for the general category has been reduced to percentile 7 from 50. Official sources said the revision aims to ensure optimal utilisation of seats

The sources said there will be no dilution of academic standards and that the revised percentile merely expands eligibility among already-qualified MBBS doctors. Transparency and fairness remain central to the process, it had added.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) had formally requested a revision of the qualifying cut-off on 12 January, citing the need to prevent seat wastage and strengthen healthcare services. — *PTI*

Audit links 15 Indore deaths to water contamination

INDORE, 14 JAN

An audit report has been submitted to the Indore administration on the deaths of 21 persons in Bhagirathpura, with findings suggesting 15 of the deaths may be linked to a recent outbreak of vomiting and diarrhoea in the area, according to sources.

Five new cases of diarrhoea, linked to drinking contaminated water in the Bhagirathpura area of Indore, the country's cleanest city, were found on Tuesday, a Madhya Pradesh health department official said.

Indore Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) Dr Madhav Prasad Hasani said new diarrhoea patients from Bhagirathpura visited the outpatient department (OPD) of health centres, where they were treated.

The local administration has so far confirmed the deaths of six persons due to vomiting and diarrhoea caused by drinking contaminated water. However, local residents claimed 23 patients, including a six-month-old child, have died due to the outbreak.

Meanwhile, a committee from the government-run Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College here has submitted an 'audit' report to the administration on the deaths of21 persons in Bhagirathpura.

A civic worker examining Narmada water pipelines after the deaths caused by the consumption of contaminated water, in the Bhagirathpura area of Indore in Madhya Pradesh PHOTO: PTI

Sources familiar with the contents of the report on Tuesday said 15 of these deaths may be linked to the vomiting and diarrhoea outbreak in some way.

"A committee of doctors from the college was formed to analyse the causes of the deaths in Bhagirathpura. This committee has submitted its report," District Magistrate Shivam Verma told reporters on Tuesday.

He said some fatalities in Bhagirathpura were likely due to contaminated drinking water, but the deaths of some patients were unrelated to the outbreak. — *PTI*

Goa govt tables Bill to decriminalise minor offences

PANAJI, 14 JAN

The Goa government has introduced a Bill in the Assembly seeking to decriminalise minor offences like illegal construction, land misuse in waste management areas, encroachments, waste dumping and obstruction of public spaces. The Bill proposes to replace imprisonment for such offences with monetary penalties to ensure ease of living and doing business.

The government tabled the Goa Jan Vishwas (Laws Amendment) Bill, 2026, in the Assembly on Tuesday, seeking to decriminalise minor offences across multiple state laws. It is likely to be taken up for discussion at a later stage.

The Bill is aligned with similar decriminalisation exercises undertaken by the Centre, and is intended to improve administrative efficiency, and reduce litigation.

It proposes amendments to a dozen state laws, including laws governing excise, waste management, fire services, land revenue, municipalities, panchayats, health and civic administration, by removing criminal liability for minor violations and rationalising fines and penalties. — *PTI*

WARNING TO PAKISTAN

Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's resolve: Army Chief

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi said Operation Sindoor was a "defining demonstration" of India's resolve and restraint, and a reflection of the professional excellence of the country's armed forces.

The operation was carried out by Indian armed forces in the early hours of 7 May last year, eliminating at least 100 terrorists in response to the Pahalgam terror attack in April that killed 26 innocent civilians.

General Dwivedi was addressing a gathering of cadets at the National Cadet Corps' (NCC) Republic Day Camp here on Wednesday.

A day earlier, he sent a firm message to Pakistan, saying Operation Sindoor "is still on and any misadventure will be resolutely responded to."

The Army chief recalled the contribution of the NCC during the military action last May.

During the operation, over 75,000 NCC cadets volunteered across the country, working tirelessly in civil defence, hospital management, disaster relief and community services, the Army chief said.

Initiatives such as Army cells in Indian Institute of Technolgies, technology clusters and the Army internship programme 2025 and 2026 are intended to foster that spirit, the Army chief said. "We invite you to actively participate in national security, innovation and development initiatives."

General Dwivedi also told the gathering that the vision of Viksit Bharat at 2047 cannot be achieved by the government alone. "It can be achieved by NCC cadets, innovators, teachers, engineers, doctors, soldiers, and citizens like you," he said. —*PTI*

Security forces intensify search ops in Kathua

Security forces stepped up a search operation by extending the cordon to neutralise terrorists in the remote villages of Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, officials said.

Gunshots were heard when the security forces launched the operation in the Najote forest area in Billawar tehsil on Tuesday based on information about the presence of a terrorist there.

There was no contact between the terrorist and the security forces. He took food from a shepherd around midnight before moving deep into the forest. —*PTI*

LANKA NAVY ARRESTS 10 INDIANS

COLOMBO, 14 JAN

The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 10 Indian fishermen and seized their trawler for allegedly fishing in the nation's territorial waters.

The arrests were made on Monday in the northern sea area off Delft Island, the Navy said in a statement.

The 10 Indian fishermen and their seized trawler were handed over to the Fisheries Inspector of Myliddy, Jaffna, for legal proceedings, it said.

Fishermen from both countries are arrested frequently for inadvertently trespassing into each other's waters.

The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters.

The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries.

In 2025, the Sri Lankan Navy apprehended 346 Indian fishermen for alleged poaching and seized 44 trawlers, according to the statement. — *PTI*

Two nurses with Nipah infection shifted to Kolkata

KOLKATA, 14 JAN

Both the nurses who tested positive for Nipah virus were admitted to the Beliaghata ID Hospital in Kolkata, a senior health department official said.

One was brought to the hospital on Tuesday night, while the other, a house staff member, was shifted from Burdwan Medical College and Hospital early Wednesday, he added.

"The condition of both remains extremely critical. They are still in coma and has been admitted to the ICCU," the official said.

Incidentally, a resident medical officer (RMO) at Barasat hospital, who had been in contact with the infected nurses, also showed symptoms of Nipah, he said.

One of the nurses had recently returned from her hometown in Katwa in Purba Bardhaman district, where she fell ill.

A source said the other nurse had a history of travelling to Ghugragachi in Nadia district. — *PTI*

Protest erupts against Varanasi demolitions

VARANASI, 14 JAN

A demolition drive at the Manikarnika Ghat was met with protests from locals, who alleged that the city's heritage was being destroyed in the name of redevelopment, a charge rejected by the district administration.

Officials said that the drive was carried out under a redevelopment plan of Manikarnika Ghat on Tuesday.

Manikarnika Ghat is one of the oldest and most sacred cremation grounds in Hinduism, believed to grant 'moksha' or liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and holds immense religious and cultural significance for devotees across the country.

Police stand guard at Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi after people protested on Wednesday against the alleged demolition of idols at the ghat during the ongoing renovation PHOTO: PTI

The protest largely included members of the Pal Samaj Samiti, among other locals. However, the administration said the row appeared to have been triggered due to confusion over the redevelopment work.

Leading the protest, a samiti member, Mahendra Pal, alleged "Under the guise of development, the original character of Manikarnika Ghat was being tampered with and the city's heritage was being destroyed."

The district administration, however, rejected the allegations, asserting that no temple at the ghat had been demolished during the work.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate Alok Verma said there appeared to be some confusion regarding the works.

"We suspect the involvement of outsiders. The ACP will also inquire into the matter. People living at the ghat are not protesting," he said. — *PTI*

UP'S GONDA MED COLLEGE

Rats, open switch boards endanger patients

GONDA, 14 JAN

The Babu Ishwar Sharan Hospital in Gonda, affiliated to the Gonda Medical College in UP, is posing a danger to patients. Along with possibilities of infection, the chances of a fire are also haunting patients here.

The Gonda Medical College, founded in 2024, is affiliated to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Medical University, Lucknow, and it offers the MBBS course. But now rats are making headlines in the orthopaedics ward here. A video which has gone viral shows three to four rats climbing the oxygen pipeline. Rats keep moving in the wards. The video of rats roaming in the medical ward is going viral on the internet, which has led to allegations of negligence by the hospital management.

Rats have a free run in the orthopaedics ward of the Gonda Medical College in Uttar Pradesh PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Open electric switch boards pose the threat of short circuits. The families of patients complained to the nursing staff but no action was taken.

After the video surfaced, the principal has ordered an inquiry along with the spraying of pesticides. As per the instructions of the District Magistrate,, the Principal has ordered an inquiry and pesticides are being sprayed in all the wards.

The Principal of the Autonomous State Medical College, Dr. Dhananjay Srikant said that pesticides have been sprayed in the wards. A probe has been ordered after the video went viral. He said action would be taken against those found violating cleanliness norms.

He said that the family members of patients come with food, which attracts rats. He assured that no negligence of any kind regarding the safety of patients will be tolerated.

Dr Rakesh Tiwari said that rat bite fever (RBF) is a rare bacterial disease spread by infected rats and can be life threatening. —*PTI*

Lokpal junks graft plaint against BJP MP Dubey

PANAJI, 14 JAN

Anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal has dismissed a graft complaint against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey and termed the allegations as "frivolous" and "vexatious."

In its 134-page order, the Lokpal said the complainant — ex-IPS officer Amitabh Thakur — has failed to make out any case against Dubey.

"The allegations are frivolous," said the order issued on Tuesday by a Lokpal bench, headed by Justice AM Khanwilkar.

Thakur, who is also the president of Azad Adhikar Sena party, had last May filed a complaint against Dubey alleging acquisition of disproportionate assets by him.

The complainant, who relied on affidavits filed by Dubey during elections in the years 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024, kept on improvising the allegations in his plaint, the order noted.

Thakur had in his complaint claimed that while the movable and immovable properties of Dubey have remained more or less constant, "that of his wife Mrs Anamika increased massively."

Dubey idenied all allegations. He said that his wife is engaged in providing consultancy services and has been filing IT returns regularly.

"We find substance in Dubey's stand that the increase in the value of his wife's assets is not due to acquisition of new assets but because of increase in market value," the order said. —*PTI*

INCREDIBLE INDIA

India celebrated its harvest festivals on Wednesday, with devotees taking holy dips at the Sangam in Prayagraj during the Magh Mela for Makar Sankranti. Over nine lakh people bathed in the Ganga and at the Sangam, officials said. In Chennai, residents marked Bhogi and the start of Pongal with bonfires, while in Assam, rituals were performed around the traditional burning of Meji during Magh Bihu ***PHOTOS: PTI***

Medical body raises red flag after NEET cut-off slashed

Dr Rohan Krishnan, Chief Patron of the Federation of All India Medical Association (FAIMA), on Wednesday criticised the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) for lowering the NEET-PG qualifying percentile to fill vacant postgraduate medical seats.

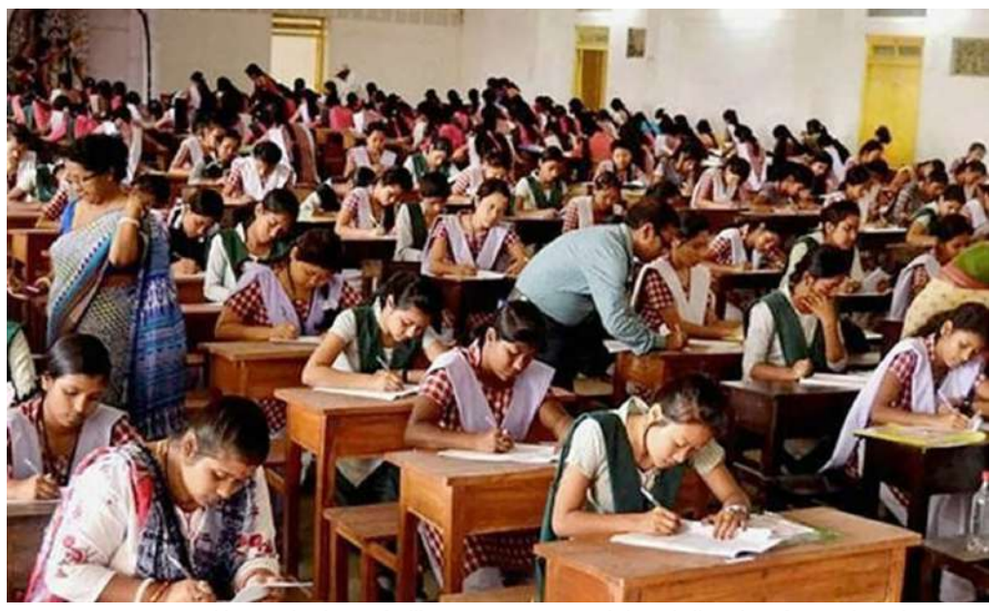
In a video message, Krishnan said that reducing the cut-off to the zero percentile means that even candidates who scored below the cut-off are now eligible for postgraduate medical admissions.

"The NEET PG percentile has again been reduced and this time it has been reduced to zero percentile. For this means that for someone who has scored minus 40 in the examination means that who has not if someone who would have not attempted any question would have gotten zero, but there are these people who have attempted questions and attempted a lot of wrong questions and that is why they have they have gotten minus 40 in their examination system and they are also eligible to become clinicians in this country," Krishnan said in a video message.

Krishnan warned that such candidates would be permitted to practice medicine and perform surgeries, calling the development alarming.

"They are also eligible to take part in surgeries, they are also eligible to practice medicine in this nation. I think that this is very sad and it has become a trend that every year they are reducing the percentile of the NEET and if we want to see that why it is happening, why it is they are constantly reducing, then we must understand that this is because they want to fill up the seats of the private medical colleges," Krishnan said.

He alleged that several private colleges offering postgraduate seats lack adequate infrastructure, teaching facilities, patient load, and medical equipment, discouraging meritorious students from seeking admission.



NEET-PG serves as a ranking mechanism to facilitate transparent, merit-based allocation of seats through centralised counselling ***PHOTO: PTI***

"What happens is that there are colleges which are substandard, suboptimal, not having proper teaching facilities, not having proper medical patients, not having any good equipments and so that meritorious students will not go and take admission in such colleges. Now what happens is that they want to fill these seats because each such colleges, there are many colleges which should have not been given permissions to run clinical seats, to run postgraduate seats but are having 20-20 seats in clinical subjects," Krishnan said.

Expressing disappointment, Krishnan apologised to medical students, stating that this situation has persisted for the past five years. Krishnan alleged that private players continue to increase seats because lowering the cut-off allows even remote colleges with inadequate facilities to gain approvals. He stressed the need to strictly regulate permissions granted to medical colleges. "And I'm sorry as a medical leader also to all the students that they have to witness this and it is very sad state of affairs because I was not expecting that they will again do this. This has happened to become a trend from past five years. They are doing it again and again and that is why private players are again increasing the seats because they think that since the demand supply ratio is such that if you reduce the cutoff to zero and minus, even some college in the remote areas which have no facilities whatsoever will also get permission. So we have to curtail the permission part at first which is very important," he said.

"It is very sacrosanct and medical education for sale will not happen if we are there and we are not going to let this happen anymore. And we will think of doing corrective measures and we will also try to fix an appointment and meet with the concerned people regarding this," he added.

In a significant move to address the large number of vacant postgraduate medical seats across the country, National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) has revised the qualifying percentiles for NEET-PG 2025 admissions.

According to sources to ANI , "This decision follows the completion of Round-2 counselling, where over 18,000 PG seats remained unfilled in government and private medical colleges."

"The revision aims to ensure optimal utilisation of available seats, which are vital for expanding India's pool of trained medical specialists. Leaving such seats vacant undermines national efforts to improve healthcare delivery and results in the loss of valuable educational resources," sources said further.

All NEET-PG candidates are MBBS-qualified doctors who have completed their degrees and internships. NEET-PG serves as a ranking mechanism to facilitate transparent, merit-based allocation of seats through centralised counselling. The previous percentile thresholds had restricted the pool of eligible candidates despite the availability of seats. *—ANI*

SALAR سالار

WB's Nadia tops list of illegal voters after SIR hearings

The West Bengal government said the SIR in the state has so far led to the identification of more than 11,000 "illegal" voters, with Nadia district accounting for the overwhelming majority, while no such electors have been found yet in Bankura and the southern part of the city during the ongoing hearings.

The Election Commission, however, did not respond to the data shared by the state government on Tuesday.

The EC is holding Special Intensive Revision (SIR) hearings across the state, where it has found logical discrepancies.

According to the data released by the state government, as many as 9,30,993 voters have completed hearings under the ongoing SIR process, and their details have been uploaded online.

Following these hearings and verification of documents, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), who are state government employees, have so far identified 11,472 voters as "illegal", whose names will be deleted from the final electoral roll, officials said.

The SIR exercise, aimed at cleaning up the voters' list, has generated a total of 65,78,058 notices across the state so far. Of these, 32,49,091 notices have already been issued, the state government data said.

Hearings have been completed for 9,30,993 voters who received notices, leading to the identification of the illegal voters, officials said.

District-wise figures shared by the state government showed that Nadia has recorded the highest number of illegal voters at 9,228 after hearings.

People arrange their documents during SIR hearing in Nadia, West Bengal, on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

In contrast, despite a large number of notices being generated, no illegal voters have been found so far in the south Kolkata, where 1,36,561 notices were generated, and Bankura, where 1,63,357 notices were issued.

According to the data, Cooch Behar reported 10 illegal voters so far, Jalpaiguri four, Darjeeling two, Uttar Dinajpur two and Dakshin Dinajpur 195.

In Malda, 15 voters were identified as illegal, while Murshidabad recorded 68, North 24 Parganas 147 and South 24 Parganas 69.

In north Kolkata, 54 illegal voters were found, while Howrah reported 26, Hooghly 989 and Purba Medinipur two. Paschim Medinipur district recorded 105 such voters, Purulia 44, Purba Bardhaman 167 and Birbhum 264.

Among the hill and forest districts, Alipurduar reported nine illegal voters, Kalimpong 65, Jhargram three and Paschim Bardhaman four, officials said.

The SIR process has become a major political flashpoint in the state, with opposition parties claiming that the exercise would help identify fake voters, while the ruling Trinamool Congress has questioned the manner in which it is being carried out.

Political observers said the latest figures released by the state government are likely to intensify the debate further, as all eyes are now on whether the number of illegal voters changes when the final electoral rolls are published.

The data comes amid heightened political sparring over the SIR exercise.

After the completion of the first phase, the draft electoral rolls published on December 16 showed the electorate shrinking from 7.66 crore to 7.08 crore, with over 58 lakh names deleted statewide.

According to Election Commission officials, the exclusions in the first phase were made on grounds such as death, permanent migration, duplication and non-submission of enumeration forms.

The draft rolls also showed that around 1.83 lakh voters were categorised as 'fake' or 'ghost'.

The second part of the SIR is currently underway and involves hearings of 1.67 crore electors under scrutiny, including 1.36 crore flagged for logical discrepancies and around 31 lakh voters whose records lack mapping. *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Maharashtra gears up as India's richest civic bodies go to polls today

As Maharashtra heads to the elections on Thursday for 29 municipal corporations, the spotlight is on Mumbai, where the BJP-led Mahayuti is locked in a battle with the united Thackeray front for control of the cash-rich BMC.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has predicted that MNS leader Raj Thackeray would emerge as the biggest loser in his alliance with cousin and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray.

He also dismissed the coming together of both NCP factions in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad as merely a localised development.

Fadnavis rued that Deputy Chief Minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar broke the rule that the alliance partners will not speak against each other.

CM Fadnavis led the ruling alliance's canvassing, traversing the state to campaign for candidates of the Mahayuti, which includes the BJP and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

NCP, the third partner in the Mahayuti, was strategically excluded to attract "non-Hindu" voters, observers said.

This will be the Shiv Sena's first Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election since the 2022 split, when Eknath Shinde broke away with a majority of the party's legislators, along with its name and symbol. The undivided Shiv Sena had held sway over the country's richest civic body for 25 years.

Polling for the 2,869 seats spread across 893 wards will begin at 7.30am and conclude at 5.30pm on 15 January. A total of 3.48 crore voters are eligible to decide the fate of 15,931 candidates, including 1,700 in Mumbai and 1,166 in Pune.

In practice, BMC is one of the largest spending authorities in the country, with a budget that now rivals, and in some cases exceeds, that of smaller Indian states.

Counting of votes will take place on 16 January.

More than 25,000 police personnel, including senior officers, will be deployed across Mumbai to oversee elections to the BMC and vote counting.

Except for Mumbai, the other 28 urban bodies have multi-member wards.

In a political turn ahead of the elections, estranged cousins Uddhav and Raj Thackeray reunited after two decades in their bid to consolidate Marathi votes, even as rival NCP factions forged a local alliance in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad.

In this election, the Opposition Congress has asserted its presence in Mumbai by stepping out of the shadow of its Maha Vikas Aghadi allies - Shiv Sena (UBT) and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP).

Security personnel and polling officials amid preparations ahead of Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation election on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Congress has joined hands with Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) and the Rashtriya Samaj Paksh in the state capital, even as it contests independently in Nagpur.

Elections to 29 municipal corporations are being held after a gap of over six years, with their terms having ended between 2020 and 2023. Of these, nine fall within the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), the most urbanised belt in India.

The battlegrounds include Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Navi Mumbai, Vasai-Virar, Kalyan-Dombivli, Kolhapur, Nagpur, Mumbai, Solapur, Amravati, Akola, Nashik, Pimpri-Chinchwad, Pune, Ulhasnagar, Thane, Chandrapur, Parbhani, Mira-Bhayandar, Nanded-Waghala, Panvel, Bhiwandi-Nizampur, Latur, Malegaon, Sangli-Miraj-Kupwad, Jalgaon, Ahilyanagar, Dhule, Jalna and Ichalkaranji.

Populist promises for women were the highlight of the manifestos of both the Mahayuti and the Shiv Sena (UBT)-MNS.

The Mahayuti has promised a 50 per cent concession for women in BEST bus travel, while the Thackeray cousins have assured a Rs 1,500 monthly allowance for women domestic helps and a property tax waiver on houses up to 700 sq ft.

Congress manifesto, by contrast, prioritises combating Mumbai's pollution, upgrading the BEST fleet, and strengthening the city's financial health.

The race for Mumbai's mayoral post took centre stage in the campaign, with the BJP claiming that a Sena (UBT) victory could lead to a Muslim mayor, a charge the Uddhav Thackeray-led party countered by assuring voters of a Marathi mayor.

CM Fadnavis also guaranteed that the mayor will be a "Hindu and Marathi".

In the 227-ward Mumbai, the BJP is contesting 137 seats, the Shiv Sena 90, while the NCP is fighting separately on 94 seats. The Shiv Sena (UBT) has fielded 163 candidates, the MNS 52, the Congress 143 and the VBA 46.

The Congress has fielded 1,263 candidates across the rest of the state.

Downplaying the coming together of the rival NCPs in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad as a "localised phenomenon", he said the BJP will react only if both factions decide to ally after the polls, which he felt was unlikely at the moment.

Fadnavis also remarked that the Thackerays lacked wholehearted commitment in their campaign and appeared "unwilling to stake their political prestige".

While asserting that the BJP remains the central force around which Maharashtra's politics will revolve in the future, he acknowledged that electoral setbacks do not spell the end for any party or leader. Those who strive to make a comeback can still find success, he added. *—PTI*

Kurds, Syrian Army clash in Aleppo

ALEPPO, 14 JAN

Syrian government forces and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) exchanged fire on Tuesday in eastern Aleppo province, amid rising tensions after days of clashes in the city. No casualties were reported. The fighting comes amid stalled talks over a March deal for the SDF to merge into the national army by the end of 2025. The Syrian army declared areas east of Aleppo a "closed military zone", accusing the SDF of building up forces near Deir Hafer and Maskana and using the area to launch drone attacks. Last week's clashes displaced tens of thousands before Kurdish fighters evacuated Sheikh Maqsoud, now under full government control. The SDF denies mobilisation and criticises Damascus for violating the merger deal.— *PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Grammy nominated musician John Forte dies at 50

NEW YORK, 14 JAN

John Forte, the Grammy-nominated musician known for his work with the Fugees and the Refugee Camp All-Stars, has died at 50. He was found at his home in Chilmark, Massachusetts, on Monday, with no signs of foul play, police said. Forte, a New York City native, contributed to the Fugees' Grammy-winning 'The Score' and 'Wyclef Jean's The Carnival', and released solo albums including 'Poly Sci' and 'I John'. In 2000, he was jailed for drug offences, serving seven years before President George W Bush commuted his sentence. Forte is survived by his wife, Lara Fuller, and two children.—*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Actor Sutherland arrested for threatening driver

LOS ANGELES, 14 JAN

Actor Kiefer Sutherland, 66, was arrested early Monday in Los Angeles on suspicion of criminal threats after allegedly assaulting a ride-hail driver. Police said the actor entered the vehicle just after midnight, physically attacked the driver, and "made criminal threats". The driver did not require medical attention. Sutherland was released on a USD 50,000 bond and is due to appear in court on 2 February. His representatives did not respond to requests for comment. The British-Canadian actor, son of Donald Sutherland, is best known for his role as Jack Bauer in 24. —*PTI*

Zoe Saladanha becomes highest grossing lead actor

LOS ANGELES, 14 JAN

Hollywood star Zoe Saldana has become the highest-grossing leading actor of all time at the global box office, thanks to the success of 'Avatar: Fire and Ash'. Box office tracker Numbers reports she has earned USD 15.46 billion from 33 films, averaging nearly USD 469 million per movie. Her record includes blockbusters such as 'Avatar (2009)', 'Avengers: Endgame (2019)', 'Avatar: The Way of Water (2022)' and 'Avengers: Infinity War (2018)'. Saldana is the first actress to star in four films grossing over USD 2 billion. She thanked all for support.— *PTI*

Trump tells Iran to 'behave' & not to hang people

US President Donald Trump flips off a heckler calling him a paedophile President *PHOTO: X*

Iran fast-tracks execution cases as toll rises

WASHINGTON/TEHRAN, 14 JAN

As the protests continue to rise in Iran, US President Donald Trump on Tuesday warned the country of "consequences" if it continues violent actions against its own citizens, saying Tehran "better behave".

His comments come as the head of Iran's judiciary signalled on Wednesday there would be fast trials and executions for those detained in nationwide protests. The death toll from the protest has already crossed 2,571, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency said.

Iran has not yet released the official number of casualties, but Iranian media has pegged the number between 12,000 and 20,000. Trump noted that he wasn't sure what the toll was, but said it was "significant".

"These people have been living in hell for a long time. I have friends who used to invest in Iran, and they did well with their investments. It was a great place…. And now it is living in hell," he said. Meanwhile, Starlink has dropped its fees in Iran to allow citizens to circumvent the communication blackout. Starlink is banned in Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran's military has been put on high alert amid the possibility of a US strike. American personnel have also been asked to evacuate a US military base in Qatar. Iran also threatened to hit American military bases in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Iran held a mass funeral of some 100 security force members killed in the demonstrations. —*Agencies*

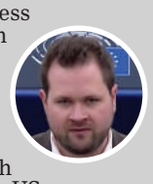
Iran aired nearly 100 coerced confessions

Iran aired at least 97 confessions from protesters, which activists say were coerced. The US-based News Agency believes many of the confessions were elicited after torture. The rights group said this modus operandi become a stapple in the Iranian regime. Iran alleges these confessions, which often include references to Israel or US, are proof of foreign plots behind Iran's nationwide protests. However, the nearly 100 confessions broadcast over just two weeks is unprecedented for Iran.

Need Greenland for Golden Dome: Trump's new power pitch

NUUK, 14 JAN

Trump said that NATO should help the US acquire Greenland and anything less than American control is "unacceptable". He said on Truth Social that US control of Greenland was needed for his "Golden Dome" missile defence project.



The Golden Dome system is Trump's multi-billion-dollar project, modelled after Israel's 'Iron Dome' defence system. His post came hours before Vice President JD Vance was to host Danish and Greenlandic officials for talks.

He added that Russia and China were looking to control the semi-autonomous mineral rich island.

'TRUMP CAN FK OFF'**

Anders Vistisen, a Danish member of the European Parliament, said in the assembly on Tuesday that Greenland has been part of Denmark for 800 years and is not for sale.

"Let me put it in words you would understand, Mr Trump, f**k off," he said.

Meanwhile, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Greenland PM Jens-Frederik Nielsen said that Greenlanders would always choose Denmark and NATO over the United States. —*Agencies*

Yunus reaffirms commitment to hold elections in February

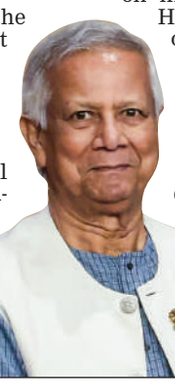
DHAKA, 14 JAN

- "Interim Government would remain completely neutral during the elections, ensuring an unbiased administration and a level playing field for all political parties, according to the statement"

Bangladesh Interim Government Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on Wednesday reaffirmed his government's commitment to hold the general elections and the referendum as scheduled on 12 February.

"No matter who says what, elections will be held on 12 February --not a day before, not a day after," the Chief Adviser said, adding that the vote would be free, fair and peaceful, and held in a festive atmosphere, according to a government statement.

He stated that the Interim Government would remain completely neutral during the elections, ensuring an unbiased administration and a level playing field for all political parties, according to the statement.



Yunus made the remarks when two former senior United States diplomats--Albert Gombis and Morse Tan, both of whom served during the Donald Trump administration--called on him at the State Guest House Jamuna in Dhaka on late Tuesday night.

Bangladesh, meanwhile, has suspended the Visa on Arrival from 15 January to 15 February ahead of the elections and referendum, even as Chief Adviser sought UNHR help in curbing misinformation against the coming elections. —*ANI*

Israel to cut ties with UN bodies, will review others

TEL AVIV, 14 JAN

Israel has decided to immediately sever contact with several United Nations agencies and review cooperation with others, citing persistent bias and politicisation, Minister of Foreign Affairs Gideon Sa'ar said on Tuesday.

In a post on X, the Foreign Ministry said the move followed an examination prompted by the United States' withdrawal from dozens of international organisations and Israel's own experience with UN bodies.

Sa'ar ordered an immediate review, in consultation with relevant ministries, of continued cooperation with additional organisations, with further decisions to follow.

Israel has already cut ties with four UN bodies referenced in the US announcement, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict and UN Women.

Israel is also disengaged from UNCTAD and ESCWA, accusing both of issuing "virulent anti-Israel reports."

The ministry said ties will also be severed with the UN Alliance of Civilisations, UN Energy, and the Global Forum on Migration and Development going forward. —*ANI*

SENATE VOTE MAY REDUCE DON'S POWER TO USE FORCE IN VENEZUELA

WASHINGTON, 14 JAN

Lawmakers are preparing to vote on a resolution that aims to limit the President's ability to carry out further military action against Venezuela. Senate Republicans are facing increasing pressure from Trump as five GOP lawmakers joined with Democrats to advance the resolution last week.

Democrats forced the voted after US troops "arrested" Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro earlier this month. Trump called some of the Republicans who switched "stone cold losers".

Even if the Senate passes the legislation, Trump would need to sign it for it to become law.

Meanwhile, Trump said that Venezuela has begun shipping oil to the US. He said 50 million barrels worth USD 5 million have started coming in daily.

Trump said Venezuela's interim government is "working well". —*Agencies*

A protester try to avoid tear gas dispersed by a federal agent in Minneapolis city in United States *PHOTO: PTI*

US to end deportation protection for Somalis

WASHINGTON, 14 JAN

The Trump administration on Tuesday said that it will end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for immigrants from Somalia, removing deportation protections for hundreds of people as part of its wider immigration crackdown.

The Department of Homeland Security said affected Somalis must leave the United States by 17 March, when protections last extended by former president Joe Biden expire.

"Temporary means temporary," Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said, adding the move puts "Americans first".

The Congressional Research Service estimates 705 Somalis are covered by TPS, a small share of nearly 1.3 million beneficiaries nationwide. Noem said conditions in Somalia have improved and no longer meet legal requirements.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations condemned the decision as a "bigoted attack", warning it would force returns to an unstable, conflict-hit country.

Congress created TPS in 1990 for foreign nationals fleeing extraordinary conditions. Somalia first received the designation in 1991 and has received more than two dozen extensions over decades.—*PTI*

Crane falls onto moving train in Thailand; kills 32

BANGKOK, 14 JAN

A construction crane collapsed onto a moving passenger train in northeastern Thailand on Wednesday, triggering a fiery derailment that killed at least 32 people and injured over 80 others, officials said.

Rescuers continued searching the wreckage and giving first aid at the site in Nakhon Ratchasima province.

The accident occurred on a section of elevated railway under construction as part of a planned Thai-Chinese high-speed rail project. The crane fell while the train was travelling from Bangkok to Ubon Ratchathani, according to the provincial public relations office.

Images carried by Thai media showed thick plumes of white and black smoke rising above the tracks, with construction equipment hanging between concrete pillars. Video footage from public broadcaster ThaiPBS showed rescue workers standing atop overturned carriages, some ripped open, as paramedics treated injured passengers nearby. Debris believed to be parts of the crane lay scattered along the line.

Thai media reported the train had three carriages, with the last two suffering the heaviest damage. Transport Minister Piphat Ratchakitprakan said 195 passengers were on board and that he had ordered an investigation into the cause of the accident.

The collapsed structure was part of the Bangkok–Nong Khai high-speed railway, a two-stage project costing more than 520 billion baht, or about $16.8 billion. The line is linked to China's Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to improve connectivity across Southeast Asia.

In August 2024, a railway tunnel on the same route in Nakhon Ratchasima collapsed, killing three workers, after days of heavy rainfall, officials said. —*PTI*

The photo, released from Thailand's Ministry of Transport, shows smoke billowing after a construction crane fell into a passenger train in Nakhon Ratchasima province, Thailand, on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

FOR CROSS-BORDER PAYMENTS

Pak ties up with Don's crypto business

Pakistan inking deal with Trump's business *PHOTO: @PakistanVARA*

ISLAMABAD, 14 JAN

Pakistan signed an agreement with a company linked to World Liberty Financial, the main cryptocurrency business of the family of US President Donald Trump, to explore using a digital currency for cross-border payments, a source said on Wednesday.

The deal is one of the first public partnerships between World Liberty, a crypto platform launched in September 2024, and a country.

The MoU was signed by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and Zach Witkoff, son of US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, and co-founder and chief executive of World Liberty, in Islamabad. The other founders are Zachary Folkman, Chase Herro and Alex Witkoff.

Under the agreement, World Liberty will work with Pakistan's central bank to test the use of its dollar-backed stablecoin within Pakistan's regulated payment system.

The central bank is preparing a digital currency pilot and new laws to regulate virtual assets. About 17.5 million Pakistanis are estimated to hold nearly $5 billion in cryptocurrencies. Meanwhile, Turkey is in talks to join a Saudi Arabia–Pakistan security deal similar to NATO. —*Agencies*

Govt cuts off internet ahead of polls in Uganda

KAMPALA, 14 JAN

Ugandans are set to vote on Thursday as the government cut off internet just 48 hours prior as well as the sale and registration of new SIM cards.

President Yoweri Museveni, who has held power since 1986, is likely to win the election, as analysts raise concerns about transparency, military interference and vote tampering at polling stations. However, he faces a strong challenge from the musician-turned-politician best known as Bobi Wine, a 43-year-old who represents those yearning for political change.

Museveni's son Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, is the top commander of the military, which has been accused of interfering the electoral process.

In a New Year's Eve address, the President recommended security forces use tear gas to break up crowds of what he called "the criminal opposition." —*PTI*

The citizens of Uganda are set to vote on 15 January *PHOTO: X*

Rupee falls by 6P, closes at 90.29 against USD

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

The rupee pared initial gains and settled for the day 6 paise lower at 90.29 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as the likely central bank intervention was negated by a strong dollar, foreign outflows from capital markets, and elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said the rupee is likely to trade with a negative bias on risk aversion in global markets and geopolitical tensions; however, rising odds of a rate cut amid softening inflation and any intervention by the central bank may support the rupee at lower levels. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.26 and touched the intra-day low of 90.30 and a high of 89.94 against the greenback. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Silver and gold prices extend record run

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Silver prices zoomed by Rs 15,000 to a fresh record of Rs 2,86,000 per kg in the national capital on Wednesday, while gold also climbed to touch a lifetime high of Rs 1,46,500 per 10g, tracking strong global trends. As per the All India Sarafa Association, silver prices extended their blistering rally for the fourth consecutive day by jumping Rs 15,000, or 5.5 per cent, to touch a new peak of Rs 2,86,000 per kilogram up from Tuesday's close of Rs 2,71,000 per kg. With this rise, the metal had appreciated by Rs 42,500, or 17.45 per cent, over the past four sessions from Rs 2,43,500 per kg on 8 January. Spot silver breached USD 91 per ounce-mark for the first time.*—PTI*

Tesla debuts in Bengaluru with 1st pop-up experience

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

ACKO Drive, an integrated automotive platform that helps users buy new cars, sell used vehicles, and access car servicing, will host an "exclusive Tesla experience" in Bengaluru from 15 to 31 January. The showcase will be held at the ACKO Drive Service Center in Kudlu Gate and is open to the public, marking Tesla's first such event here. Ashish Mishra, ACKO executive vice president, said Bengaluru's technology-focused consumer base made it an ideal location. Visitors can view and experience Tesla Model Y vehicles, the world's best-selling car in 2023 and 2024, which features five-star safety ratings and rapid-charging capability. Test-drive slots can be booked via the Tesla India website, with drives conducted from the service center.Specialists will guide visitors through the car's features.*—PTI*

IOC, BPCL report oil discoveries in Abu Dhabi block

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) have announced significant oil discoveries in an onshore block in Abu Dhabi, enhancing their international upstream portfolio and supporting India's energy security.Urja Bharat Pte Ltd (UBPL), a 50:50 special purpose vehicle of IOC and BPCL's exploration arm Bharat PetroResources Ltd (BPRL), made its first oil discovery in early 2024 at the XN-76 exploratory well. Following successful hydro-fracturing, the unconventional Shilaif formation flowed light crude oil at surface, confirming the presence of unconventional oil resources in the block. A second discovery occurred at the XN-79 02S exploratory well, which flowed crude from the Habshan reservoir—the first such find within this concession.*—PTI*

Wholesale inflation rises to 8-month high of 0.83%

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Wholesale price inflation increased for the second month in a row, rising 0.83 per cent in December 2025, driven by an uptick in prices of food, non-food articles, and manufactured items on a month-on-month basis, government data showed on Wednesday.

After witnessing a deflationary trend in the previous two months, the wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation returned to positive in December. In November and October, the pace of price rise was negative at (-) 0.32 per cent and (-) 1.02 per cent, respectively.

In contrast, WPI inflation was 2.57 per cent in December 2024.

"Positive rate of inflation in December 2025 is primarily due to an increase in prices of other manufacturing, minerals, manufacture of machinery and equipment, manufacture of food products, and textiles, etc," the industry ministry said in a statement.

According to WPI data, deflation in food articles was 0.43 per cent in December, as against 4.16 per cent in November.

In vegetables, deflation was 3.50 per cent in December, compared to 20.23 per cent in November.

In case of manufactured products, WPI inflation inched up to 1.82 per cent from 1.33 per cent in November 2025.

The non-food articles category showed an inflation of 2.95 per cent in December, against 2.27 per cent in November.

Negative inflation or deflation continued in the fuel and power sectors, at 2.31 per cent in December, against 2.27 per cent a month ago. *—PTI*

Mkts tumble for 2nd day amid tense geopolitics

Sensex falls by 245 points, while Nifty declines by 67 points

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined on Wednesday, extending their previous day's losses, due to weakness in IT, consumption, and select banking blue-chip stocks amid escalating geopolitical tensions.

Besides, persistent foreign fund outflows and fresh tariff-related uncertainties also unnerved investors, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 244.98 points, or 0.29 per cent, to settle at 83,382.71. During the day, it fell 442.49 points or 0.52 per cent to 83,185.20.

The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 66.70 points, or 0.26 per cent, to 25,665.60.

Selective buying in markets and investors' interest in metals, commodities, and energy stocks provided limited support to indices.

Selective buying in markets and investors' interest in metals, commodities and energy stocks provided limited support to indices **PHOTO: PTI**

From the 30-Sensex firms, Tata Consultancy Services, Asian Paints, Maruti, Sun Pharma, Hindustan Unilever, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank and Larsen & Toubro were among the biggest laggards.

On the other hand, Tata Steel, NTPC, Axis Bank and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers.

Investors remained hesitant amid mixed global cues and lingering geopolitical concerns. Overall sentiment was cautious to negative, with consolidation likely to persist as traders weigh FII outflows, global tariff pressures, and near-term technical supports, said Aakash Shah, Technical Research Analyst at Choice Equity Broking Private Limited.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.25 per cent, and the midcap index rose by 0.16 per cent.Among sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT dropped 1.30 per cent, realty (0.98 per cent), consumer durables (0.96 per cent), IT (0.96 per cent), auto (0.62 per cent), FMCG (0.53 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.42 per cent). *—PTI*

INVESTORS PANICKED

Kotak shares crash by 80% amid stocksplit

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Kotak Mahindra Bank shares seemed to crash sharply in early trade on Wednesday, falling by over 80 per cent and touching a day's low of Rs 425.05 on the BSE, sources said.

According to sources, the move created panic among investors tracking the stock. However, the sharp fall was not due to any problem in the bank's business, but due to a technical price adjustment linked to the bank's 5:1 stock split on Wednesday. The shares were trading ex-split, which means the stock price adjusted to reflect the higher number of shares in circulation.

Before the split, the shares were trading above Rs 2,100. After the 5:1 split, the price adjusted to around Rs 420. Sources said the stock was actually down by only about 1.6 per cent during the session, which is normal.

The bank's market capitalisation, adjusted for the split, stands at about Rs 83,500 crore. Over the past one year, the stock is still up by more than 9 per cent, it added.

Moreover, if an investor held one share of the bank before the split, that now become five shares in the demat account after the record date, it said.

According to sources, once the corporate action is processed by the depositories, the updated share count becomes visible.

Stock splits are mainly done to improve liquidity and make shares more affordable for a larger number of retail investors. *—Agencies*

Union Budget set to boost infra, capital goods sector: report

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The upcoming Union Budget 2026 will be a key trigger for the industrial sector, with higher government allocation likely to support a recovery in domestic ordering, particularly for infrastructure and capital goods companies, according to a report by HDFC Securities Institutional Research.

The report highlighted that road awards by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) have remained subdued so far in FY26, raising expectations that the Budget could provide additional support to revive project awarding.

In the first nine months of FY26, road awards stood at 1,951 km, while construction activity also slowed to 4,621 km till November 2025.

However, the bidding pipeline remains intact, with projects being finalised on schedule.

The working capital releases under the Jal Jeevan Mission have also started, which should ease liquidity pressures for EPC players. These companies are diversifying into non-road segments. *—PTI*

Infosys loses Rs 1,289 crore in Q3

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Infosys on Wednesday reported a one-time exceptional hit of Rs 1,289 crore on account of the impact of the implementation of new labour codes, as India's second-largest IT services firm announced its December quarter earnings.

Earlier this week, larger rival Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) said the implementation of the new labour codes during the quarter led to a "statutory impact" of Rs 2,128 crore, while Noida-headquartered HCLTech made a one-time provision of USD 82 million (Rs 719 crore) for the implementation of new labour codes.

Infosys reported a 2.2 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 6,654 crore in the October-December quarter of FY26, as compared to Rs 6,806 crore in the year-ago period.

Infosys' revenue from operations grew 8.89 per cent to Rs 45,479 crore compared to Rs 41,764 crore in Q3 FY25.

The company has raised its revenue growth guidance for FY26 to 3-3.5 per cent in constant currency, from 2-3 per cent earlier.

A significant highlight of the results of the Q3 FY26 was the impact of the notification issued by the Government of India regarding the Labour Codes on November 21, 2025. *—PTI*

Groww Q2 profit drops by 28% to Rs 547 cr

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Billionbrains Garage Ventures, the parent company of stockbroking platform Groww, on Wednesday reported a 28 per cent year-on-year decline in profit after tax at Rs 547 crore in the quarter ended December 2025.

The company had posted a PAT (profit after tax) of Rs 757 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous fiscal.

Despite the fall in profit, total income during the quarter rose 26 per cent to Rs 1,261 crore, compared with Rs 1,004 crore in the year-ago period, the Bengaluru-headquartered firm said in a statement.

On a sequential basis, PAT grew 16 per cent from Rs 471 crore reported in the September quarter (Q2 FY26). The year-on-year decline was largely due to a one-time post-tax gain of Rs 315 crore recorded in Q3 FY25. Excluding this exceptional item, operating PAT increased by a robust 24 per cent year-on-year to Rs 442 crore. Groww shares were trading 3.35 per cent higher at Rs 168.15 on the BSE.*—PTI*

Taiwan seeks OnePlus CEO's arrest over illegal hires

TAIPEI, 14 JAN

Taiwan's Shilin District Prosecutors have issued an arrest warrant against the chief executive officer of Chinese smartphone maker OnePlus, charging him with alleged involvement in unlawful business and recruitment.

The Prosecutors' Office said in a document that it had indicted two Taiwanese citizens for helping OnePlus CEO Pete Lau illegally operate a business and recruit more than 70 employees in Taiwan. The allegations fall under Taiwanese law governing relations with China.

The document, dated November 2025, was first reported by Taiwan local media on Tuesday.

Over 70 employees were hired in Taiwan to conduct smartphone software application research and development, verification and testing for the Chinese smartphone maker, prosecutors said.

OnePlus is headquartered in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen. It became an independent sub-brand under Oppo in 2021, according to its website.

Beijing claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory and has never renounced the use of force to bring the island under its control.

Taiwan rejects China's sovereignty claims and says only the island's people can decide their future.

But Taiwan's tech expertise has made it a magnet for Chinese companies seeking talented workers. *—Agencies*

GLOBAL PASSPORT INDEX

Which passports are the world's most powerful?

Singapore has once again topped the world as Henley & Partners released the 2026 Henley Passport Index. The index ranks passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa. Here are the passport rankings and the number of destinations citizens can travel to visa-free:

TOP 10 POWERFUL PASSPORTS

Ranking		Visa free Destinations
1.	Singapore	192
2.	Japan & South Korea	188
3.	Denmark, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden & Switzerland –	186
4.	Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands and Norway	185
5.	Hungary, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia & UAE	184
6.	Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Malta, New Zealand & Poland	183
7.	Australia, Latvia, Liechtenstein & UK	182
8.	Canada, Iceland & Lithuania	181
9.	Malaysia	180
10.	US	179

THE 5 WEAKEST PASSPORTS

Ranking		Visa free Destinations
97.	Somalia	33
98.	Pakistan & Yemen	31
99.	Iraq	29
100.	Syria	26
101.	Afghanistan	24

PIRAMAL TARGETS $1B FOREIGN LOANS

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

Non-bank lender Piramal Finance plans to raise up to USD 1 billion annually from foreign sources as part of a strategy to diversify its funding, said CEO Jairam Sridharan. The company has already secured USD 350 million from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) and is in advanced discussions to obtain an additional USD 150 million from a multilateral agency over the next three weeks.

In FY25, the company raised USD 800 million through external commercial borrowings and bond issuance. It did not tap foreign markets in FY26 as recent rate cuts made domestic borrowing cheaper. The landed cost of funds in rupee terms for the latest foreign issuance's, including hedging, is 8–8.5 per cent, compared with 8.75–8.8 per cent for domestic funding, making it accretive for net interest margins (NIM). However, not all foreign borrowings will be NIM-accretive. *—PTI*

'M'RASHTRA IS TOP EXPORT-READY STATE'

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat have emerged as the top three states in the Niti Aayog's fourth Export Preparedness Index (EPI), 2024.

The index is aimed at assessing the readiness of states in terms of their export potential and performance.

Maharashtra is followed by Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Punjab.

Uttarakhand leads among the small states, followed by Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu, Goa, and Tripura.

NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam said that as India expands its network of Free Trade and Economic Partnership Agreements, the importance of strong domestic foundations only grows.

Several states have already begun strengthening their export vision through dedicated policies, institutions, and infrastructure. *—PTI*

Shadowfax sets IPO price band of Rs 118–124/share

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

India's buoyant primary market continues to attract major issuers, with logistics firm Shadowfax and premium flexible workspace provider Executive Center India advancing their initial public offerings (IPOs).

Shadowfax on Wednesday fixed a price band of Rs 118–124 per share for its Rs 1,907-crore IPO, valuing the company at over Rs 7,100 crore at the upper end. The issue will open for subscription from 20 January to 22 January, with anchor bidding on 19 January, and shares expected to list on 28 January.

Separately, Executive Center India has received Sebi's approval to raise Rs 2,600 crore through a 100 per cent fresh equity IPO, with no offer-for-sale component.

The Mumbai-based company plans to use the proceeds for investments in overseas subsidiaries and acquisitions within its promoter group.

Operating in India since 2008, Executive Center India runs 89 centers across 14 cities in seven countries and reported FY25 revenue of Rs 1,322.64 crore, up 27.6 per cent year on year.

The developments come amid a record year for India's IPO market, supported by strong liquidity and confidence of the investors. *—PTI*

Daryl and Will shine as NZ register record chase in India

KL Rahul's unbeaten ton was eclipsed by Daryl Mitchell

RAJKOT, 14 JAN

Indian spinners were outbowled on home turf once again, and KL Rahul's unbeaten ton was eclipsed by Daryl Mitchell's splendid 131 not out as New Zealand levelled the three-match series 1-1 with a seven-wicket win in the second ODI here on Wednesday.

New Zealand not only adapted but also executed better than India on a sluggish wicket here at the Niranjan Shah Stadium to keep the hosts to 284/7 despite Rahul's 91-ball 112 not out (9 fours, 1 six), and overhauled the target in 47.3 overs to end at 286 for three. The series-deciding third ODI will be played in Indore on Sunday.

Daryl Mitchell
PHOTO: PTI

Young and Mitchell, among the architects of New Zealand's 3-0 Test series win over India on their previous visit, batted with poise and control even as the asking rate hovered over six an over. Young's (87 from 98 balls; 7 fours) solidity in the middle was complemented by the adroitness of Mitchell. Debutant left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox, summoned on this trip as a replacement for Mitchell Santner, kept a tight leash on Indian batters,s returning 10-0-42-1 while Kuldeep Yadav (10-0-82-1) kept bowling short and failed to give the ball a flight despite repeated messages from Rahul behind the wickets.

Earlier, KL Rahul held a faltering innings together on a sluggish surface with a gutsy hundred. Rahul produced a gritty unbeaten 112 off 92 balls, which included 11 fours and two sixes, forging vital partnerships in the second half and snatching control from the Kiwis who had run through India's formidable batting line-up earlier. KL Rahul held a faltering innings together on a sluggish surface with a gutsy hundred, guiding India to 284/7 in the second ODI against New Zealand here on Wednesday.

Brief Scores:

India: 284 for 7 in 50 overs. (KL Rahul 112 not out, S Gill 56; Kristian Clarke 3/56). New Zealand: 286 for 3 in overs. (D Mitchell 131 not out, W Young 87; P Krishna 1/49). —*PTI*

VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY 2026

In-form Padikkal is key for Karnataka against Vidarbha

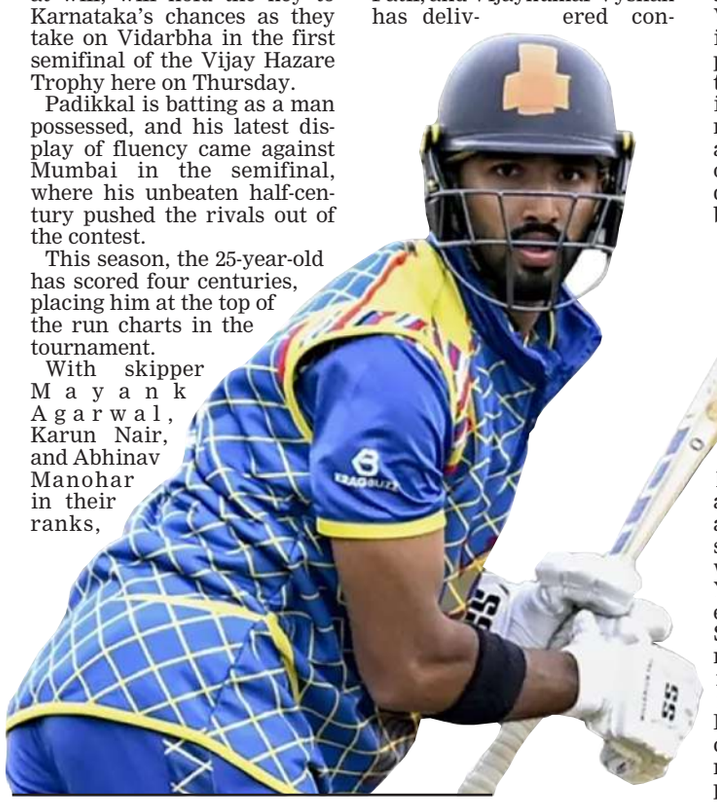
BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Devdutt Padikkal, who appears to have found a magic bat of sorts and is scoring runs at will, will hold the key to Karnataka's chances as they take on Vidarbha in the first semifinal of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Thursday.

Padikkal is batting as a man possessed, and his latest display of fluency came against Mumbai in the semifinal, where his unbeaten half-century pushed the rivals out of the contest.

This season, the 25-year-old has scored four centuries, placing him at the top of the run charts in the tournament.

With skipper Mayank Agarwal, Karun Nair, and Abhinav Manohar in their ranks, Karnataka's batting appears well settled. Complementing it perfectly, their pace quartet of Vidwath Kaverappa, Abhilash Shetty, Vidyadhar Patil, and Vijaykumar Vyshak has delivered consistently this season, driving the team's impressive run. However, they will need to guard against the law of averages, which could prove costly after such an assertive run. Vidarbha has shown the intent to post multiple 300-plus totals this season, and they are equally adept at chasing big targets. Their nine-wicket group-stage win against Baroda stands out, having chased down 293 with 50 balls to spare.



Young top-order batter Aman Mokade has also enjoyed a prolific season, scoring four centuries and a half-century. However, his single-digit scores in the last two matches are something skipper Harsh Dubey would want him to address. Stalwarts like Taide and Dhruv Shorey add further solidity to Vidarbha's batting, while veteran right-arm pacer Yash Thakur has been in excellent form, carrying his Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 performance into the 50-over tournament with 13 wickets in seven matches. Left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey has also made crucial contributions at key moments. Match Starts: 1:30 pm. —*PTI*

Bhambri and Goransson duo reach semifinals

AUCKLAND, 14 JAN

Top seeds Yuki Bhambri and Andre Goransson advanced to the men's doubles semifinals at the Auckland Open, an ATP 250 event, with a thrilling win on Wednesday. Bhambri and Goransson defeated the all-Czech pair of Petr Nouza and Patrik Rikl 6-3, 6-7(3), [10-6] in the quarterfinals. Earlier, the Indo-Swedish duo took down wildcards Ajeet Rai (New Zealand) and Jean-Julien Rojer (Netherlands) 6-3, 6-2 in the first round. Reigning men's national champion Velavan Senthilkumar and Ramit Tandon began the new PSA season on a winning note at the DR 21Motor City Open.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@WTA

Alcaraz and Aryna top-seeded players in Aus Open

MELBOURNE, 14 JAN

Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka were officially made the top-seeded players for the Australian Open, which begins Sunday at Melbourne Park. The announcement on Wednesday comes a day ahead of the tournament draw. Two-time defending champion Jannik Sinner was seeded second, with Alexander Zverev third and 10-time champion Novak Djokovic fourth. Sabalenka, Iga Swiatek, and Coco Gauff are the top three seeds in the women's draw for the second consecutive year. Madison Keys returns as the defending champion and the ninth-seeded player, one of four American women among the top 10 seeds.—*PTI*

Riaz asked to supervise Pakistan women's squad

LAHORE, 14 JAN

Pakistan's former fast bowler and ex-national selector Wahab Riaz has been asked to supervise the national women's squad during a white-ball series in South Africa next month. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Wednesday said that Wahab would be the mentor of the team and would be assisted by a coaching staff including former players Imran Farhat and Abdul Rehman. The women's squad will be led in both white-ball formats by Fatima Sana, and it will be the first assignment for the side after their debacle last November in the ICC World Cup in India and Sri Lanka. —*PTI*

Marijne formally joins Indian women's hockey team

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Dutchman Sjoerd Marijne on Wednesday formally joined the Indian women's hockey team as its chief coach, renewing his association with the squad after a fruitful four-year first stint from 2017 to 2021.

He was reappointed to the post nearly two weeks ago, marking his return to the set-up after guiding the side to a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics.

Hockey India posted a photo of Marijne being welcomed by the country's top sports official and administrators of the federation.

Marijne also posted a photo of his arrival at the IGI Airport with a caption that read "With fresh energy back in India.In his job, the 51-year-old will be supported by Matias Vila as the team's analytical coach. Marijne's first big challenge as chief coach will be the Women's World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad from 8 to 14 March.

Marijne replaced Harendra Singh, who resigned in December last year due to poor results.

In his first stint as chief coach of the Indian women's hockey team, Marijne also led the side to the World League semi-finals in 2017 and silver medals at the 2018 Women's Asian Champions Trophy and Jakarta Asian Games.

Then, in 2019, India qualified for the Tokyo Olympics, beating the USA 6-5 on aggregate in the FIH Olympic Qualifiers.Marijne quit citing personal reasons after India's loss to Great Britain in the bronze medal playoff match in Tokyo in 2021.

The national coaching camp is scheduled to begin on 19 January in SAI, Bengaluru. —*PTI*

EYEING SIXTH TITLE

India face USA as U-19 WC begins

BULAWAYO, 14 JAN

Favourites India will look to flaunt their superabundance of talent as they begin the quest for a record-extending sixth Under-19 World Cup title with what is expected to be a rather easy outing against the USA in the ICC showpiece beginning here on Thursday.

Champions in five of the 16 editions, India are by far the most dominant team in the history of the competition, which started back in 1988 with Australia emerging as the winners in the inaugural event.

The likes of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Kane Williamson, Joe Root, and Steve Smith, who have over the years established themselves as stalwarts of the game, first gained prominence through this very tournament, which gave the cricket world an early peek into their exceptional talent.

Shubman Gill, India's current Test and ODI skipper, too first burst onto the scene with his exploits in the 2018 edition, in which the team triumphed under the leadership of Prithvi Shaw, whose fortunes have, however, waned in recent years after an excellent start to his international career. —*PTI*

Kohli displaces Rohit to be No. 1 men's ODI batter

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Rohit Sharma as the top-ranked batter in men's ODIs on the ICC table after his 91-ball 93 led India's chase to top New Zealand's 300 in the first ODI of the three-match series in Vadodara on Sunday.

With the latest update, Kohli has achieved the top spot on the table for the 11th time. He first got there in October 2013 and has now spent a total of 825 days at No.1, the most by an Indian batter. Kohli is in tenth place in the all-time list, which is topped by Vivian Richards, who held the top position for 2306 days.

His recent run has been spectacular. Before the Player-of-the-Match-winning performance in Vadodara, he had a sequence of 74*, 135, 102 and 65* in his last four ODIs, the only format he is still active in internationally. As for Rohit, he has not only conceded the top spot, but has also slipped two spots to No. 3 after scoring just 26 in the opening ODI. Daryl Mitchell, who top-scored with 84 in 71 balls for New Zealand in that game, has moved up to No. 2 from No. 3. But those spots could change with one standout innings: Kohli has 785 points, Mitchell 784, and Rohit 775.

KL Rahul is the other batter to make a move up the table, going from No. 12 to No. 11 after scoring 29 not out in 21 deliveries in Vadodara. —*PTI*

MCA TO INTRODUCE CENTRAL CONTRACTS FOR MUMBAI PLAYERS

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

The Mumbai Cricket Association on Wednesday said it would introduce central contracts for its senior team players along with a scouting tournament for discovering young talent for its T20 league.

These decisions were taken by the MCA's apex council meeting, which also decided to introduce an inter-college tournament to be named after former India captain Dilip Vengsarkar.

"The Apex Council has taken a series of forward-looking decisions aimed at building a strong, inclusive and sustainable cricketing ecosystem in Mumbai," the MCA said in a statement. "These initiatives are designed to enhance player development, ensure long-term well-being, and create clear pathways for emerging talent to progress to elite levels of the game."

While the inter-college tournament is meant to nurture young players at the collegiate level, the scouting tournament for its eight-team T20 tournament will help in "creating a clear and merit-based pathway for young players to progress to elite competitive levels". —*PTI*

INDIA OPEN: SINDHU OUT, SRIKANTH REACHES ROUND OF 1

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu was knocked out of the India Open, but Kidambi Srikanth and HS Prannoy progressed to the second round on a mixed day for the hosts at the USD 950,000 Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

Sindhu, who reached the semifinals of Malaysia Super 1000 last week, couldn't maintain the pressure after narrowly pocketing the opening game to eventually go down 22-20, 12-21, 15-21 to Vietnam's Thuy Linh Nguyen in 68 minutes.

Earlier, former world No.1 Srikanth had to dig deep to outlast fellow Indian Tharun Mannepalli 15-21, 21-6, 21-19, while Malvika Bansod, returning from an injury layoff, displayed patience and defensive solidity to beat Chinese Taipei's Pai Yu Po 21-18, 21-19. The Indian women's doubles campaign also got off to a positive start with Treesa and Gayatri cruising past Thailand's Ornnicha Jongsathapornparn and Sukitta Suwachai 21-15, 21-11. —*PTI*

Australia to play three matches in Pakistan before T20 World Cup

LAHORE, 14 JAN

Australia will play three T20 Internationals in Lahore before the ICC T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said on Wednesday.

Australia will play day-night matches at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on January 29, 31, and February 1 before both teams leave for the mega event.

While Australia is playing its World Cup group games in India, Pakistan will be based in Sri Lanka for its matches.

This is the first time since April 2022 that Australia will tour Pakistan for a T20 series, as they last came to the country to play a Test series and then a white-ball rubber that year.

The Australians will reach Lahore on January 28 for the short series.

Australia had, however, played some of their Champions Trophy matches last year in Pakistan. —*PTI*

BWF FINED

Pollution forced me to pull out of IO: Antonsen

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

World No.3 Anders Antonsen on Wednesday said he has withdrawn from the ongoing India Open due to "extreme" air pollution in the national capital and copped a USD 5,000 fine from the Badminton World Federation (BWF) for his decision.

A four-time World Championships medallist, Antonsen's remarks came a day after fellow Dane Mia Blichfeldt criticised the playing conditions at the USD 950,000 event.

"Many are curious why I have pulled out of the India Open for the third consecutive year. Due to the extreme pollution in Delhi at the moment, I don't think it's a place to host a badminton tournament," Antonsen wrote on his Instagram page.

The Danish shuttler also shared a screenshot of Delhi's Air Quality Index reading on Instagram, which showed the AQI at 348 and categorised the conditions as hazardous.

Srikanth defends India Open playing conditions

Former world No.1 Kidambi Srikanth on Wednesday defended the playing conditions at the ongoing India Open, asserting that he is yet to come across anything "bad" at the venue and that minor organisational challenges are not specific to one host nation.

Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt had caused a storm on Tuesday by criticising the conditions at the Indira Gandhi Stadium complex, calling the surroundings "unhealthy" and urging the Badminton World Federation (BWF) to intervene ahead of the World Championships later this year at the same venue. —*PTI*

American Shelton advances to Auckland ATP QFs

AUCKLAND, 14 JAN

Eighth-ranked Ben Shelton "knocked off the rust" in his first match of 2026 on Wednesday with a 7-5, 6-4 win over Francisco Comesana in the ATP Tour event in Auckland, New Zealand.

As the top-seeded player, the American had a bye through the first round of the ATP 250 tournament, which he has chosen to start his season in each of his last four years.

With his coach and father, Brian Shelton, and his partner, U.S. women's soccer team star Trinity Rodman,n courtside, Shelton saved a set point in the first set to beatthe 68th-ranked Argentina player in 1 hour, 42 minutes.

Shelton had 12 aces and won 78% of first-serve points, but his game showed signs of recent inactivity. "I feel great, knocked off a little bit of rust, but just feel great to be back playing, back competing," Shelton said. "I think it's great when you get to play a competitive match, feel the tension at certain points of the match.—*PTI*